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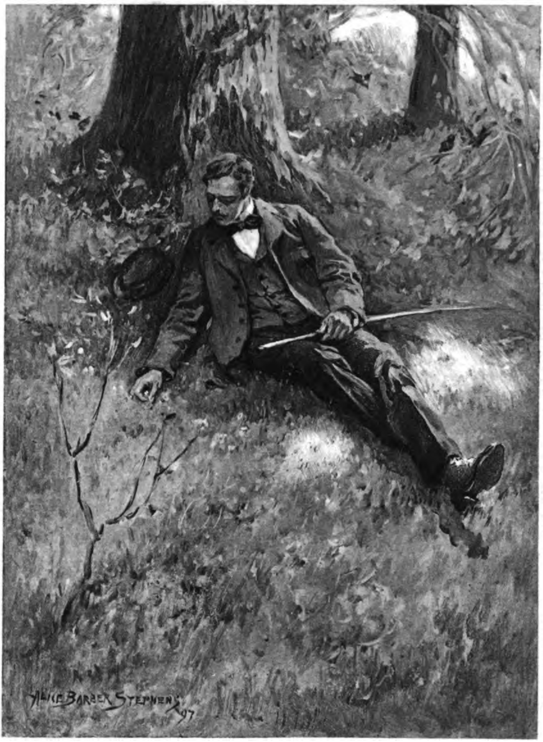
To charm life's idle hours;
To frowning cliffs rare beauty clings
When decked with laughing flowers.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BY

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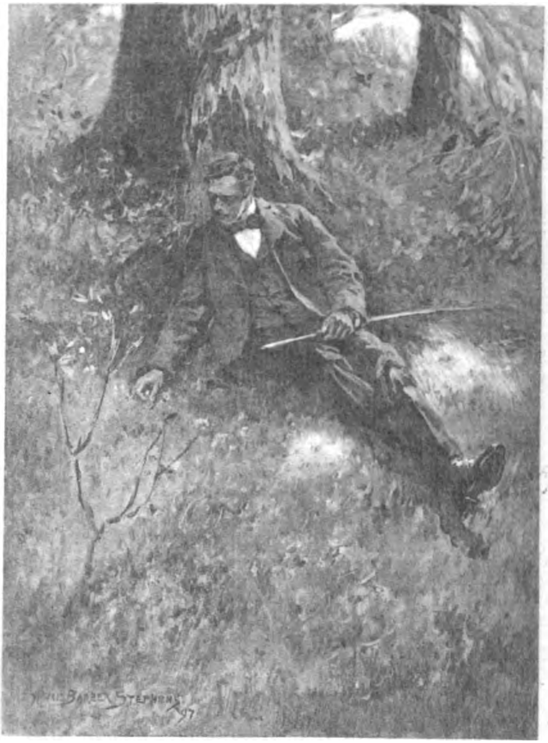

April Day Dreams
By Alice Barber Stephens

THE FREEDOM OF THE FIELDS

BY
CHARLES C. ABBOTT

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DEDICATE
TO
WALTER FAXON,
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,

THIS SIMPLE RECORD OF MY LATER DAYS AND DOINGS.

C. C. A.

Three Beeches,
May 25, 1897.

PREFACE

THE author has this consolation: a preface is the whim of the publisher, and so no reasonable reader will look for literary merit in this perfunctory feature of a book.

I have one statement to make that gives me great satisfaction and is in place here, if anywhere. I wrote the following pages for my own amusement, and never for an instant had in mind either the patience of a possible reader or the views of any publisher as to what a book should be. I have not adopted a single suggestion made by critics of earlier volumes, but gone out of my way to repeat the offence, complained of recently, of sneering at the impudent assumption of some, necessarily nameless. For once, I have said my say in precisely my own fashion. Never before has this privilege been unrestrictedly allowed me, and not improbably there are those who will cry out, "So much the worse for you."

Pages, here and there, of this volume have seen the light of day before in periodicals, and are here reproduced by permission. I trust the reader will not be moved to say of such, "And once was quite sufficient," or feel it his duty to find serious fault with that which confronts him for the first time.

C. C. A.

THREE BEECHES,
May 25, 1897.

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By Alice Barber Stephens

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AN APRIL DAY DREAM

AT the foot of the hill, where the wild winds of winter can never reach, and a bubbling spring keeps all frost at arm's length, there I have been accustomed to go for many a year, not to witness any exciting event or hear the initial concert of the coming season, but because that airy fairy creature Spring first touches the earth at this point. Here we find the first of her footprints, and always, before going up to possess the land, she here tests her power of revivification by kissing the heavy eyelids of the sleeping violets. Can there be better reason for this vernal stroll to the hill-foot? The very fact that the year's proper beginning is so generally associated with youth, and youth in its most attractive guise is of itself an inducement to give more heed to the season of promise than to those of fulfilment which follow.

How often the lively play of spring has been performed on this planet the geologists have never told us, but for a good ten thousand years or more there has been no revision of the text, and yet there is no lack of novelty. The quips and cranks of the imps that follow in the train of her ethereal mildness are always fresh. Likewise, the loveliness of dewy violets, of golden daffodils, and blushing arbutus are as dear to us as they were to our forbears in the infancy of the race. But we are never asked to be content with a flower. An endless array of attractions is spread before us, but, being blind, we cry out that the world is empty. It is not uncommon to find men posing as perfection and criticising that part of the world wherein they happen to be, and a genuine appreciation of nature detects in such the only blemish of an admirable outlook. To-day, though Winter has not yet quite relaxed his hold, there were abundant violets; and what emerald outsparkles the dewy mosses? Here, at the foot of an old oak that had sheltered many a passing Indian from the midsummer sun, and perhaps bore yet the scars blazed upon it by the first

Dutch trader that passed down the Delaware; here, in the bright April sunshine, I had but to raise my eyes to skies of marvellous beauty. Surely there is cause for joy in a cloud-flecked sky, and who lacks company when with budding oaks?

Here, here! called the ecstatic crested tit, as if I had a thought of leaving such a pleasant place. There are times when one can more profitably curl up in a corner and indulge in day-dreams than wander about; and this nook, with its April sunshine, invited to meditation. The mystery of the mosses, the significance of the flowers, the changefulness of panoramic skies, and, back of all, if we give up these problems in despair, the suggestiveness of patriarchal oaks. I had no need to be called back by that embodiment of all birdly virtues, the crested tit, the bird of all others that knows nothing of discouragement, and bids us keep in good heart under the blackest skies.

All that surrounds us speaks to us, but too often in strange tongue. Patience is an excellent interpreter, but how seldom we welcome it. It were worthy of the day to read the wrinkles of the gnarly oak; but again the birds called, and I looked away. A thrush was busy with last winter's leaves, and chirped excitedly when it found me at the old oak's mossy foot. It scolded, I think, protesting that I was trespassing in bird-land; and well it might, for have we not relinquished all our rights by years of persecution that must forever be a disgrace? How I wished that this early thrush would sing! But I knew that it was a passing visitor, and not in tune. Its melody was reserved for some far New England wood, and I was content to recall the summer thrushes I have known. Waving a violet wand to bring back other days, I saw again the rudely paved path leading to the old spring-house, and heard again the gurgling water as it hurried through the long troughs wherein were placed the rows of milk-pans. Passing them, the water took up a livelier strain, and sang a sweet, sibilant song as it greeted the sunshine. Sparkling water is to be found everywhere,—"laughing water," as the Indians called it; rippling currents smile in every brook; hurried waters rush over every obstructing rock; but nowhere since those early days have I seen a more merry flow than that of this old spring-house brook. It was the first "wild" water I had ever seen. Has this to do with it? In its shallows, I saw for the first time living fishes; on the damp and mossy stones near its edge stood and stared bright-barred and spotted salamanders, that fled in terror from my extended hand; there, too, squatted the pretty leopard-frog, that leaped beyond my reach as I approached. It is not strange that I have seen no brook since that sparkled like this one. A full half-century has not dimmed its brightness in my fancy, and the place is as I first saw it when I close my eyes and stand beneath the drooping elm and stately maples that now mark the spot, from which, save the brook, every old-time feature has been removed.

While basking in the April sunshine, as I recall the old spring-house to-day, the outstanding glory of the place was the visit of a gentle swallow that came quite near me and gathered at the water's edge a little pellet of damp earth for the nest it was building. What a marvel of beauty was that barn swallow to my childish eyes! and the bird is just as beautiful to-day. Swallows at all times add a charm to the landscape. They are never so numerous as to be a blot upon the fair field. Early comers, they herald the more timid birds of summer, but you are all too likely to overlook them, for they are silent as the flowers when the thrushes are in song. Not literally silent,—no bird is that,—but we fail to hear their twitter when the grosbeak's grand outburst of melody fills the evening air. It is not strange. The stanch friends of childhood are usually forgotten when we face the "great" people of the earth; but what, after all, are these to the trusty folk of early and unsophisticated days? How few ever reach beyond the grade of twittering swallows and yet die envious of those who make more noise in the world and so attract the gaping crowd! "Poor and content is rich," and more's the pity that we did not place greater value on the twittering swallows of our early spring. Their twitter, when the chill of winter still lingers in the air, is sweet music, and the bird is all we ask to fill the April outlook. Poor then it may be, as compared with the wealth of later days, but were we not content, ay, exuberant, over a single swallow, and so rich? Poor and content is rich, *and rich enough!* At least, let us not be forgetful of the April days when the swallows, like guardian spirits, attended upon us and filled every path with pleasantness and peace.

But it is useless to preach: that is something long since overdone in this world; our bodies, far more than our minds, attend upon it. We bless the first swallows of the season and straightway forget them when the thrush arrives; and more, if they dare to twitter, to remind us of April happiness when we would revel in the ecstasy of May, then we curse their impudence. They do not grieve over it. Constant swallows; inconstant, miserably inconstant and inconsistent man!

A lively clatter, as if the birds of summer were dancing on dead leaves, roused me from my fancies, and I was one with the present world again. An April shower, a tearful smile, as some one has not inaptly called it, passed over the woods and across the meadows, leaving in its train glittering glories that dimmed even the early violets.

Stand, if you will, at some commanding point and overlook the landscape for miles and miles away; see not a single tree, but thousands of them; see not a single clod, but field after field; see the scattered ruins of the dead year, but never a hopeful violet at your feet, and to you it will be winter still. In a single sunny nook I found a little summer, heard nothing of the fretful moaning of chilly winds, but music enough to lead me in fancy to the flood-tide of midsummer melody. A bit of moss, scattered violets,—faint foretastes, let me hope, of the eternal spring.

THE CHANGEFUL SKIES

I cannot read;
'Twixt every page my thoughts go stray at large,
Down in the meadow.
THOREAU.

DOWN in the meadow!—a poem of four words that will never need explanatory notes. I am down in the sense of being nearer the level of the sea, when there, but up, high up, in exhilaration. Lord Bacon says that this emotion is not as profound as joy; but what use in such fine distinctions? I joy in the exhilaration that comes from breathing the meadow air, and let us attend to it, rather than to the meanings of words, that keep our cheap champions of erudition so busy. I went down to the meadows to-day, that I might more readily look upward, having thought before starting how little apt are we to consider the sky when taking an outing, and yet Shakespeare's "skyey influences" are more potent than we think. I do not mean such influence as that which leads to glancing upward in the morning, and, in the fulness of our conceit, contradicting the barometer. There are men who do this, get caught in the rain, and, denying it the next day, prove themselves not only fools, but worse. Thoreau encountered such folk even in Concord, and thought they poisoned their immediate atmosphere.

In going out of doors, it is a little strange that that which is most prominent is likely to be least noticed. The truth is, the sky, which is but a name for an appearance, is nevertheless the most obvious of facts. If not palpable as the earth beneath, it makes itself felt, which is much the same thing so far as the rambler is concerned; and certainly much is lost if we fail to respond to skyey influences.

We think little about the sky, can roam for hours beneath it without looking up; and yet it is the most assertive object in the outlook: poets have applied to it more adjectives than to any object beneath. They descant on "the witchery of the soft blue sky," but what of the heartlessness of the steel-blue canopy, when there is not a trace of life within sight or hearing? The cloudless sky of June is not that of January.

Because there were few birds, fewer flowers, and but little green grass where I chanced to wander, I took the hint from Ovid: the skies are open—let us try the skies. So I looked long upon them as they overhung the old meadows, old as the glacial period, and yet how new as compared with the sky that now looked down upon them! To-day the sky was blue, fading to violet, with one great white cloud that slowly marched to intercept the sun. It was with keen pleasure that I watched this rolled and rounded mass of drifted snow, for such it seemed, draw near. It did not dissolve nor hurry in torn fragments from the fray, but with bold front shut out the sunbeams. What a marvellous change takes place when the meadows are shifted from sunshine to shade! That short-lived shadow brought in its train a whispering breeze, but so gently did it pass that I fancied it was the shadow itself that whispered.

A word here as to the imagination. If it is kept within too close bounds, your outing is likely to prove so many miles of walking to no purpose. It is not fair to say that inaccuracy is sure to follow the free play of the imagination. Our fancy need not act as a distorting glass, and does not, except with the author's connivance. The greatest blunderers about nature have been the precise students who occasionally find themselves outside their closets. It is one thing, as Bryant puts it, to

> Go forth under the open sky and list
> To Nature's teachings,

but another to know what to do when you get there. My suggestion is to let your imagination have scope as well as your appreciation of the actual facts you meet with. There need be no conflict in your mind, nor any misleading statement, if you are moved to speak.

To return: quickly again the sky was bright and blue, and the meadows were filled with light,—a clear, warm, penetrating light, that was reaching the rootlets and bulbs in the damp soil, quickening them. The grape hyacinth had already responded, and reflected the deepest color the April skies had offered; and the earliest of our larger lilies was above the grass, with the yellow of the noonday glare in its blossoms. These flowers show well together, representing on earth the sun and sky; but how seldom do we turn from them to the high heavens! A few flowers will hold us while the firmament is marked by conditions which may, at least in our lifetime, never again occur.

There hangs in the hall a barometer that has foretold for many years, without blundering, the kind of weather that we are to have, and it can be read with profit when interpreting the skies. For instance, it often happens that before the great masses of sullen clouds, bringing the summer shower or the day-long rain, appear above the horizon, we are informed by it, and so can anticipate their coming and watch their progress. This is akin, in the pleasure it affords, to finding a new flower or hearing the song of a rare bird. There is less sameness in the cloud-flecked skies than upon the earth when light and shadow dash across the scene. I recall one long cloud that slowly rose from half the horizon at once and moved like a huge curtain overhead. The air was "light" as that on mountain-tops, and so free from dust that the senses of sight and hearing were unusually acute. The sky seemed more distant than when free from clouds, or, as the phrase goes, was hollow. The nearer objects in the outlook were more removed than usual, as though we looked through the wrong end of a field-glass, and yet every outline was distinct. Sounds that we often hear without recognizing as other than part of the general hum of the day's activity were now startling. There was not a crow in sight, yet the clamor of a hundred was plainly heard, and the whistle of a cardinal redbird and the clear call of a crested tit came from the hill-side half a mile away. Such sounds as these, coming from unseen creatures, added interest to these "hollow" skies, and from them all revelations were expected. Much besides rain comes from above. From my comfortable resting-place against a sloping willow I saw the *avant-coureurs*, it might be, of the coming storm, a long line of small black dots that slowly altered shape and, while yet afar off, proved to be herons,—long-necked, long-legged, broad-winged herons, that give such a wildness to the remaining marshes hereabouts. With a background of blue sky they might have passed unseen, but now each was grandly pictured against the leaden cloud, and in the still air I fancied I could hear the rustling of their wing-beats.

Slowly as they came they passed from sight. When they were lost to me, I turned hopefully to the point where they had appeared, and, to my surprise, saw others. These were not black specks, but white dots that lengthened into lines and grew to great white herons, following in the path of their blue brethren. The clear air and leaden background brought out every outline. I could see them move their heads from side to side, as if to view the old haunts of their ancestors. How vividly they brought back the days of old delight, when I was young and the world newer than I find it now!—those over-full days that in many a way might have continued but for the ignorance of man and the vanity of woman. It is a red-letter day of late when we can see the white herons on the river shore; yet I have seen them in great numbers, and it is on record, "the white cranes did whiten the river bank like a great snow-drift." Let heartless fashion demand a feather, and the death-warrant of thousands of birds is signed. Here and there a protesting voice may be raised, but only to be drowned in the sneers of an indifferent people. I once was foolish enough to speak of the rights of a rambler to the wild life left about us, and was met with ridicule. "I've got to practise on swallows to learn to shoot quick," was my interlocutor's reply. My summer sky must be cleared of its swallows, it seems, to meet the useless skill of a brute neighbor! How I rejoiced when his gun burst!

There is a world of suggestiveness in the words just used, "my summer skies." Therein lies ownership of a wholly satisfactory kind. They are mine without cost, without even the asking, and, better still, without depriving others,—mine, yours, the common wealth of all; and yet few, it appears, place any value upon them. To many they are of as little importance as the frame of a picture; yet often they are the real picture and the earth is but the naked platform upon which we stand to view it. It is hard to find a fitting phrase for many a panoramic sky; as the skies of early June, blue of incomparable shade, with white clouds, pink-edged and piled into fantastic shapes,—great castles that are unbuilt before you can people them with the merry elfs and fays of the month of roses. In June we have those bright skies that deepen when the day is done to blue-black, and, losing their flatness, are lifted to a hollow dome that, star-studded, shows you at last how very far away it really is. The skies that at noon rested on the tree-tops that hem in the little space about us grow immeasurably grand at midnight; and when from out these starlit skies we hear strange voices, they assume a new importance, and we begin to realize better their significance. The upper region, our sky, is seldom lacking in animal life. Probably hundreds of birds, in the course of a day, pass over us, just out of sight; and when in the silent watches of the night we plainly hear the voices of wanderers, a new chapter of ornithology is opened to us. The clear-toned call of a plover, the hoarse croak of a raven, the chirping of many finches, the fretful scream of an eagle, have all been noted in a single night. We can only follow these birds in fancy, but the fancy will not lead us astray. The direction in which they are going can be determined, the probable elevation of their flight-path estimated, the guiding features of their course made probable. Their purpose can, of course, only be conjectured. It is not strange that birds of many if not all kinds travel in the dark, for this absence of light is but relative. The stars of themselves are nothing to the birds but as they are reflected in the water. When visible in this way, they act as finger-posts along a river valley. Such doubtless is the guide to much of the annual migratorial flight; and the black lines of mountains would be readily recognized as such, while the lights beyond would indicate those of another valley, with its star-reflecting river. So comprehensive is a bird's-eye view that migration has nothing marvellous about it. May it not be, too, that these long journeys are commenced in daylight, and that when great elevation is reached the direction at the outset can be readily maintained? A bird does not fly in a circle, as a man walks when lost in the woods. When fog or excessive cloudiness is encountered, wandering birds drop to the earth, as is shown by water-birds being found upon our upland fields, perhaps miles from their accustomed haunts.

Whatever the time of year, we have excellent reasons for expecting much of the sky, and should not let our eagerness to see the objects there from close at hand cause us to forget from whence they came. Do not tell me that a bird, or a butterfly, or even an inanimate object, is but a wind-tossed accident. Do I not know it? If an object is seen to come from the sky above, why not at least endeavor to meet it in mid-air? By so doing, you take a step into the realms of fancy. Such a whim deceives no one, not even the self-elected professors of bird-lore. Some facts without fancy are as repulsive as birds without feathers, and the world is not likely to suffer because of other views than those of the painfully prosaic. Dispute this if you will; but now

> "There is a light cloud by the moon,
> 'Tis passing, and 'twill pass full soon,"

and to it I would rather attend than listen to any argument.

PASSING OF THE BLUEBIRD

IT is said that the old-time bluebird is becoming extinct; that the blessed bluebirds of our door-yards and rustic arbors are passing away; that the rude box nailed to the wall is forsaken or the home of alien sparrows; the hollow in the old apple-tree is unoccupied, and so with the May-day blossoms there will no more be heard that cheery warbling, comparable only, in its suggestiveness, to the tuneful song sparrow and lively chatter of the nervous wren. Until recently these made the jolly trio that have gladdened our gardens since Colonial days. No more bluebirds! Why not say there shall be no more spring, for is it really spring without them?

For many years, perhaps for all this century, there has stood a huge dead sycamore on the river bank, and in the hollow of its cavernous trunk bluebirds are wont to congregate. The tempests of winter, the floods of spring, even the lightning's stroke, scarcely make these trustful bluebirds afraid; or, if they flee at a time of great tumult, they soon return, and there are but few days in a year that I cannot see and hear these happy tenants of a hollow tree. At one lonely spot, alike free from man and the alien sparrow, the bluebird is still as fixed a feature as the blue sky; but the tree cannot last much longer, and then the birds will be driven to some more remote locality. The times have indeed changed. The bluebirds no longer come to us,—we must go to them.

Until within a very few years, there was a colony of bluebirds near my house, and however the conditions of the weather affected the birds found scattered over the country, here to-day and gone to-morrow, those in the old hay-barrack were never far away. I do not believe that the bluebird is really dying out through natural causes, but simply that they are or have been driven off. The fatal blunder was the introduction of the English sparrow, which never did one particle of good, and now has become a positive curse, and one, I fear, beyond control.

As if we had not birds enough of our own to keep down all the worms that ever crawled on a tree! Why, then, did they not do it? it has been asked with much confidence, but a stinging reply lies in wait for the questioner. We would not let them. For years on years there was absolute indifference in the matter of bird-protection. For half a century a law has been upon the statute-books with reference to the destruction of insectivorous birds, and probably not enough fines have been collected to pay for the printing of the law. It is not long since that every boy made a collection of birds' eggs if he could, and nests and eggs are openly advertised as for sale in two-penny periodicals devoted to the destruction of wild-life, under the catchy title of Natural History Journals. In times not long gone by were many ornithologists whose influence was all for ill. The vague hope of a new species being found led them to slaughter the most familiar birds even by the thousands, and, even in these more enlightened days, a professional bird-man has described himself as "a slaughterer of the innocents." It would really seem as if some ornithologists, who should labor only for bird-preservation, are really the bird's worst foes while able to collect, and then in their declining years shed crocodile tears over the skins of their victims. Then, too, we must consider the demand for feathers for millinery purposes. At last the enormity of this vile fashion is beginning to touch the public conscience, and if Audubon societies effect half the good at which they aim, they will prove one of the more notable blessings of these later days.

But let us go back to the haunts of the bluebirds, even if deserted just now. For the first time in over twenty years I have failed to see and hear bluebirds in the month of May, and yet every other species common to the Delaware valley has been phenomenally abundant. Never were there so many warblers, both summer residents and those that were northward bound; never more thrushes, more rose-breasted grosbeaks, vireos, fly-catchers, and all the summer's tuneful host,—but no bluebirds. The reason is not difficult to determine. Every available nesting-site, such as formerly was occupied by a bluebird, is now in possession of the pestiferous sparrow. Happily, they find their superiors at times, and learn a useful lesson. I witnessed a combat recently between a pair of sparrows and a great crested fly-catcher. The nest of the latter had been tampered with, but the sparrows had cause to regret their impudence. Not only was their own nest destroyed, but both the birds soundly thrashed. There was a great commotion at the time among the birds of the orchard, and if the varied utterances of a dozen species could be translated we should have some most interesting reading. Scores of birds witnessed the battle, and, as none were silent, I fancied the sounds to be comments on the progress of the fray.

The little house wrens, with whom bluebirds are always associated in our minds, fare better than their one-time companions. When once in possession of their homes they prove able to defend them successfully, and I do not find these cheerful creatures less abundant than formerly, though fewer are found nesting in the immediate vicinity of dwellings. They have been inconvenienced by the sparrows, but not actually driven out of whole sections of the country.

Our efforts should be redoubled to aid the wren whenever persecuted, and this is a simple matter. By keeping their boxes closed, after they leave us in autumn, until their reappearance in April, we will prevent the sparrows from taking possession in their absence, and boxes built for wrens should have the entrance too small for a sparrow to pass through it. By such simple means I have baffled the worthless foreigner, and have the native wrens at my door the summer through.

There being no more tame door-yard bluebirds, I have spent the day with their wilder brethren. In a cluster of old birches on an island in the river I found these timid birds dwelling in comparative security. Their nests were in holes deserted years ago by golden-winged woodpeckers, and no foe but a man or a snake—often much alike—could have reached their eggs or young. My boat drifted to the sandy beach, and I sat very still. The birds paid no attention to me, and their singing was continuous. I closed my eyes for a while, and, while listening, saw again the old arbor with its bluebird-box at the entrance. I heard the songs sung fifty years ago, and saw the people who were then nearest to me, and now

> "All, all are gone,—the old, familiar faces."

The process of extinction, inaugurated by ignorant men, may continue to the end in our villages and about the average farmhouse, but there are spots where its blight cannot reach, and the literal fulfilment of the bluebird's doom is yet afar off. There are islands and hill-sides, deep ravines and remote woodland tracts, that offer no attractions to the invading sparrow, and here the bluebird can and does find a congenial home. It is true that in years past we almost domesticated it, but before that, in Indian times, it was a bird of the woods, and so can again become, unless our forest fires do away with timbered tracts. The passing of the bluebird is no empty phrase, but the passing is not that of out of existence, but out of reach. It is greatly to be deplored, but there seems to be no help for it.

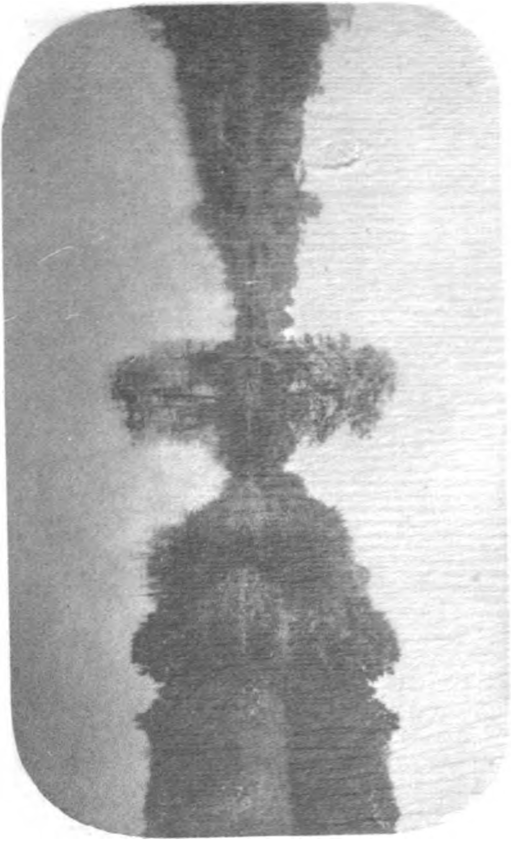
And now the question arises, Are there no other birds to take their place? I think so. By consideration for their welfare, by contributing to their needs, by preventing their being molested, the warblers, pee-wees, grosbeaks, orioles, and others will come nearer and nearer to us. I am positive of this, and have my own yard, open to all, as a proof of my assertion. I am cultivating that pretty warbler, the redstart, now, and find the bird extremely entertaining. It nests very near the house and shows no fear, merely keeping out of reach. It is but one of many kinds, and, though without a song, it is never silent, and by reason of its activity is usually more in evidence than many of the larger species. Like all little birds, redstarts are "feathered appetites," and eating from dawn to dark seems to be the sole end of their existence; but what does this signify to us? The destruction of innumerable insects, the health of shade trees, the perfecting of flowers. Of late these birds have seemed to embody every bird-world grace and typify the bird-life that is or ought to be about us. That ought to be about us: how much of meaning in those few simple words! There is not a door-yard but should be a safe harbor for every bird that now lives a life of doubtful ease in the remoter thickets. The fence that separates field from garden should be no barrier, but many are the birds that look upon the paling or boards as a danger line to be crossed with the utmost caution. In far more than half of the farms I ever visited I was compelled to go to the birds,—not one of them would come to me. They were looked upon, if a thought was ever given to them, as food for the cats or sport for the children, to keep them from mischief. Can there be greater mischief than that wrought by the persecution and destruction of the birds that ought to be about us?

Though the songs of a thousand birds ring through the leafy arches of old woods, and many a familiar strain steals through the open window these long summer days, there comes with them, all too surely, a tinge of sadness that one of the merry host is missing, and not a melancholy thrush or warbling vireo but seems to be voicing its own sorrow or echoing ours at the passing away of the bluebirds of blessed memory.

IN APATHETIC AUGUST

THE air is ever full of meaning sounds, but are our heads full of wit to interpret them? Can there be an unmeaning sound,—mere noise without significance? I think not. It is August now, and there is a marked lull in the flood of bird-music that for months has overswept the fields. The dew—for the sun has just risen—still weighs heavily upon the grass, and there is no lively creaking yet of the heat-defying crickets. But I press my ear lightly to the cool ground, and there is plainly heard the steady hum of many activities, albeit there is no name for any one of them. The quiet earth is busy as a bee, yet there is no sign of her labors; none, at least, save the low uninterrupted sound that only those who listen most carefully can hear. An unnoticed, all-neglected sound, but not unmeaning. We lack the power of its interpretation, that is all, and fling at it such a word as "unmeaning," as if we were lords of creation and not creation lord of us. Nature has little patience with mere fuss and feathers. If there is a great noise, there is a great cause behind it. We can publish our own littleness by pleading inability to explain the events of a passing day, but be cautious of criticism of superior power. Yet it is as bad to underestimate our strength. We often can do more than we think lies within our powers. We can learn more than our neighbors if we adopt better methods, nor fall by the way because so many gems of truth are in a matrix from which no human patience can extract them. Have we cultivated our patience until it has acquired the acme of its possible growth?

How very silent is this August morning! yet but a slight change in position, and I find it sound-full. Be not deceived by appearances. How deserted the woods and meadows, hill-side and upland fields! Are they? Your eyes may be more at fault than you suspect, and while you step so firmly forward you may really be playing blindman's-buff with the landscape. As I pass it by a field sparrow rises from his feast of seeds



Apathetic August

with leisure wing,—beats and trills in a listless way when perched upon a projecting stake of the old fence. It is August, the bird plainly intimates by its manner, and watches me come and go with far more indifference than distrust. Even the activity born of fear is out of place during the last month of summer. The sparrow's few and feeble notes fall into the deep rut into which all August activities have run these many centuries, and the listener, with ears as languid as his laggard steps, hears them only with August indifference. To think that bird music and the rustling of leaves are now akin. Has this sinking to a soulless level actually taken place? How far are we at fault? This same wee sparrow caused a bounding pulse last April. Then there was an electric thrill in every trembling note that sounded an invitation to the fields that could not be refused; to April fields with little more than green grass skirting the newly ploughed ground; grass, most meagrely dotted with violets that shrank from every breeze, and now this same bird song rouses no emotion. Who or what turns the current off and leaves us as much dead as alive in August?

Some malign spirit long ago undermined our faith in the merits of the month, and no one has had energy since to rebuild it.

The resolution to be up and doing is very brilliant when a suggestion to others, but how dull it becomes when a personal application! It borders on the heroic to take up a burden in August, and I was no further than thinking of the matter when a quail whistled at my side. That clear, ringing, fife-like "Bob-white" proved the bell-call that rang up the curtain of my eyes. After all, it was I that had been asleep, and not Mother Earth taking an August nap.

That little sparrow has a new song now. Every note comes bounding over the weedy grass, light-footed as an April sunbeam. The bird has quickened its pace, and marks my progress now with an eager eye. There is no indifference as to how the world may wag, and I, too, am prodded to a livelier interest. "Bob-white!" rings again through the clear air, and I am thrilled by its earnestness. Then come the rustling of many wings and sound of many voices,—a flock of red-winged blackbirds passes overhead.

As it proves, life has simply been turned into a new channel, and I have been wandering up and down the dry bed of the spring-tide river. April and August are as far apart as the poles. These dreamy, lazy, apathetic August days are far more so in name than in fact; the trouble is with ourselves.

Following in the wake of the departing blackbirds, I hurry, actually hurry, to the meadows. What though the catbirds enter a complaint! They must be patient at the intrusion, even as I am—sometimes—when dull neighbors call. There is room enough for them and myself, but they will not think so. In this respect man has a good deal of the catbird nature. I followed the blackbirds in a general way over the pastures and through many a tangle of fruit-laden blackberries. It was not necessary there should be a goal. The novelty of August activity was a sufficient incentive. When I came to a stand-still in the shade of an old sassafras, I found a red-eyed vireo quite excited over my presence, and a short search showed me that its nest was not yet empty. The poor bird's babies overfilled the nest, and in a few days they will be gone. Not gone, I hope, into the jaws of some prowling mink, for I caught a glimpse of one while hunting for the nest. Indeed, this blood-thirsty imp, and not myself, may have been the cause of the bird's distress. It is interesting to note what a cover for wild-life is provided by an unchecked growth of weeds. No tropical jungle could be more dense than that of sturdy growths through which I struggled as I came here. The tall sassafras by which I stand reaches upward from a clean grassy knoll like the mast from the deck of a ship, but all above me are weeds, breast-high and pathless. No cow, even, has broken her way through them, and where I passed is only shown by a dark line where the dew was brushed away. In such a tangle a mink, or even a larger creature, finds safe quarters through the summer. In fact, a whole regiment of vermin might take refuge here and defy detection. Perhaps, it has been thought, such places are the slums of wild-life; but has wild-life any degraded and ignoble forms? How common to find absurd impressions as to the phases of wild-life that are uncouth in our eyes! Snakes, lizards, and snapping-turtles, for instance. Their very names cause a shudder; but why? The question is seldom asked. Their deviltry is taken for granted. But those things that we ordinarily call ugly and shun, because hideous in our eyes and suggestive of all that is to be avoided for peace of mind if not for safety of the body, really possess little if anything of the features our ignorance attributes to them. Omitting to see the fitness to their surroundings of the creatures in question, we are ignorant, and must remain so, of much of which, had we better knowledge of it, would afford us endless pleasure. An imprisoned snapper in a restaurant-window rouses no interest, and may excite disgust, as it clumsily moves to and fro in hopes of finding a path to liberty. But meet this creature in the marsh and attempt to dispute its passage, you will then be forced to admire its bravery, and it will dawn upon you how admirably does its brown shell, with adhering bits of mud and weeds, blend with the beaten paths of its nightly rambles; or, if you are standing by open water and should see this same turtle lift its head above the surface, and you have a good look at its brilliant but devilish eyes, or see it with open jaws in which is struggling a writhing, squealing, slippery black catfish, you will realize that marsh, mud, weeds, dark pools of stagnant water, snappers, snakes, catfish, and scuttle-bugs are an admirably blended whole. As separate entities you may pass them by unheeded, but not when associated and Nature is the artist that has drawn the picture.

I have long preached no other doctrine than that of an apathetic August, but it is all a myth. Would that other preachers would be as honest in their convictions, though they be as changeable as weather-cocks. There is no real cessation of activity. Life has merely retired from the outskirts of creation, and bids us plunge into the interior if we would still be spectators. Looking out from the knoll—for I still lingered in the shade of the old sassafras—there was literally nothing to be seen above or about the weeds except great bronze and green dragon-flies. But if these were there, other forms of life must also have been present. Dragon-flies do not feed on flowery sweets. Butterflies, too, tossed themselves ecstatically about, and clicked their pretty wings when angry; but not all the insects of a summer day ever filled a landscape with life. Something more substantial for the earlier courses of a rambler's feast of sight-seeing is called for,—some bird or beast that can fill a weightier part. I had seen a brown mink, but his was too brief a stay; but what was needed came in all-sufficient fulness when a troop of great blue herons settled near by. I shouted and gesticulated until they flew again. Their startled antics in the air are always such an improvement over their indifferent pose when standing on the ground. These birds are too dignified for my fancy. They, too, forcibly remind me of a class of men that I never meet but I endeavor to disconcert them. To upset dignity is a delightful pastime, especially when this dignity is an ill-fitting assumption, as is so generally the case. Therefore it is I am moved to throw stones at standing herons, that I may watch them gradually disentangle their wings and legs in the upper air. But, when settled down to steady, purposeful flight, these birds add a splendid feature to the meadow landscape. A little more vim on our part; a few miles more of tramping; earlier hours and a deal more faith that we have not been deserted, and full to overflowing will prove every one of these miscalled and much-maligned apathetic August days.

A FORETASTE OF AUTUMN

TO the docile eye a meadow spring can furnish a tide of discourse. I chanced upon a sloping bank to-day, brilliant as a garden tilled with care. Nature at times is a fantastic florist. Yellow, red, and white blooms were profusely scattered in the rank grass, yet free of all rough, weedy character. The bees hummed no less happily because positive wilderness was lacking, and the cricket's cheery chirping rang out as gladly as where the tangled briers hid what remained of a long-neglected fence. Here I might have gathered strawberries a month ago, and raspberries later, for this spot had once been a garden, I am more than sure; there still is a trace of a boxwood hedge. The canes of the raspberries were richly colored, and would have warmed the landscape had it not been an August day. They sprawled over the ground and looked like gigantic purple spiders with their long, limp legs at rest; or like the after-scene of a great battle among such creatures, their brilliant purple legs, victors and vanquished alike, in a hopeless tangle. I have often noticed a scarcely defined purple cloud along the horizon,—indeed, it is seldom absent on sunny days,—but here were the richest tones of the royal color near at hand.

But I was not on a color hunt, nor yet desirous of much bird music; neither did the shade of sturdy oaks woo me. Nothing that suggested even active thoughts could induce me to turn from my pathless, aimless wandering. August now, and the fittest time for day-dreams, for chasing idle nothings in a languid way, for loitering where my last step led me, and, turning to the object nearest at hand, I plucked the bloom from a bush yarrow, and revelled in its pungent, fancy-stirring odor.

Curled at the foot of a beech, where only greenest moss and silky grasses grow, I held the yarrow blossoms to my nose until my lungs were filled with the subtle odor that revived all my waning energies. It is not a summer scent that recalls June roses or the blossoms of fruit-trees. It is heavy, rich, penetrating; a nut-like, oily, autumn odor that charges the landscape; a transporting perfume that blots out the present and pictures the future without its blemishes; gives us the spirit of autumn and veils its frost-scarred body. The bloom of the yarrow is as potent as the fruit of the fabled lotus.

Has not the landscape changed? It is August, and the first day of it, too, and yet, with yarrow blossoms in my hand, I do not see so much of summer as I did. The towering shellbarks that like sentinels stand out upon the meadows, the hill-side walnuts, the wayside chestnut, and even the shy hazel-bushes hidden along the wild brook's weedy bank,—all these must be ladened with ripened fruit, I fancy. It is crisp October, with its painted leaves, to-day, not August; such is the magic of the yarrow bloom.

Is it all fancy? What I did not see before is plainly set before me now. There on that gnarly sour-gum tree, scattered all over it, from topmost twig to its lowest trailing branches, are bright crimson leaves. That surely is a sign of autumn. No frost-ripened foliage, later, will shine with greater glory, and beyond, where the rank weeds have held their own against the cropping cows that have tramped through them all summer, is that wealth of dull gold, the trailing dodder, a gilded web of a gigantic spider,—the one with purple legs, perhaps, that we saw not far off this very day. This, too, is an autumnal plant in its suggestions: its color like the leaves of oaks and beeches when the cool nights come. So much in this world is what it suggests rather than what it really is! With what horror would we look upon the world if it was merely facts jumbled and tumbled together like a load of bricks dumped from the cart. I have in mind such an unfortunate who is zealously digging for what he supposes is never upon the surface. Never a pebble but is a pebble only to him and not a water-worn fragment of a great rock formation. And what, after all, are these naked facts to him who cannot use them? My friend has hedged himself in with facts. He has built a stone wall about him that his ignorance cannot stray, and in such a funny predicament he poses as an apostle of wisdom. No facts without fancy, if you please. They will do to dash out your brains with, but rather let death come uninvited, and every fact remain clothed and in its right mind of fanciful interpretation. It is a safe course, for no healthy fancy ever yet proved seriously mistaken; but what of many a dealer in naked facts?

How true this is of birds! There are anatomists who map the wrinkles on a bird's bones, measure their eggs, and write learned essays on browny-white and whitey-brown, who are all impatience when an amateur speaks of a living bird. The professionals are never mistaken, oh, no! but they only tell us half the truth. They are content with their soulless anatomy, and let them; but the despised amateur has another mission, and long before the crack o' doom, if not now, will be held in higher esteem than many an over-presumptuous, self-elected, carping professor of avian anatomy.

The almanac gives me no concern when I flourish yarrow-blooms about me. My nose is on duty, not my eyes, to-day, and why have this much-neglected sense of smell if we put it to no better use than as a guide to lead us from unpleasant places? How few people detect the subtle odors distilled by nature in every field and forest, by the wide river or its skirting meadows! Yet these odors are full of significance the student cannot afford to overlook. They are many and marked and full of meaning. If I were blind, I think I could make many a clever guess as to the date and, perhaps, the time of day. Much is lost if we are sensitive only to the malodorous waves of tainted air that at times cross our paths as fleeting shadows dim the bright light of day.

I take my fill again of the fragrance of yarrow, and in doing so anticipate the coming autumn. Much of the prosy side of life is given over to anticipation. Why not some of its pleasanter phases? There is little real attractiveness in an August day. It is the old age of summer, and not a very vigorous, cheerful old age either. Did I look straight before me and see nothing but a green landscape bathed in dreamy sunshine, I should grow as stolid as these huge trunks about me are sturdy and unmoved. The yarrow suggests the changes that are coming; as if Autumn in advance had stored her sweetness in this wayside weed, and so it is autumn to all my senses. The eye and nose have led me until now, and now my ears catch faint, far-off sounds, as if I heard in the distance Autumn's light footsteps. Mere fancy counts for nothing now. It is not one sound suggesting another, but the real thing. The thrushes of the early morning have long been silent, the catbirds are not complaining, the wood peewee is even too busy just now to sing, and so it would be silent here were there not noisy nuthatches overhead. They are climbing over the rough bark, and as they peep into the innumerable crannies they are chattering incessantly. This is a wholesome autumn sound, heard often when its only accompaniment is the dropping of dead leaves; and yet this August day it overtops all other sounds save the rapid rush of water over the pebbles and boulders in the bed of the brook. We must close our eyes to realize the full significance of these autumn notes of resident birds. The landscape must rest on our memory, and not upon the retina. That querulous refrain belongs to drearier days than these, even to November and its fogs and pitiless rains. It is an all-pervading sound then, and fits well with the surroundings, and the August sunshine to-day does not shut off the fog and rain when I close my eyes and listen to the nuthatches overhead. But other birds pass by, birds that have learned all the merits of my lifelong haunts and keep me company throughout the year. There in the near-by thicket is that never-failing source of cheerfulness, the Carolina wren. When the world wore its most deserted, worn-out look, last winter, this wren came every morning and sang a new soul into the wasting skeletons of every weed. The bare twigs trembled with the joy of a new-found faith, that spring would surely come again and clothe them anew with bright green leaves. When early summer's tuneful host fills the warm air with melody, we are all too apt to forget the brave winter birds; but, happily, they do not forget themselves. It was so to-day. The wren found the world too quiet for its fancy and awoke the sleepy echoes. It sounded a challenge to all drowsiness and banished noontide naps from the hill-side. Like the odor of the yarrow, it called up other days, another season with its wealth of fruits, and how the nuts and apples of October fell about me as I listened to its wonderful song, the same that I have heard these many years, when the thrushes have departed and not a warbler is left of the nesting host that thronged the blossoming orchard.

However sultry the midsummer day, a whiff of yarrow carries us forward to the coming coolness of September mornings. However quiet the midsummer moon, let but a single note fall from a winter songster, and frosty October is spread about us. In short, if we have not smothered our fancy in our rage for facts, be summer what it may, it never conceals from those who know where to look the secret of conjuring up at will delightful, reviving, faith-sustaining foretastes of autumn.

INDIAN SUMMER

GOSSAMER and old gold; brown leaves, bleached grasses, and gray twigs; green pines, that now look black in the distance, and frost-defying mosses; such are the salient features of this bright November day. I am in a new country and at every step am met by strangers, but I know their cousins that are dwellers with-me on the home hill-side. To feel that I am a stranger robs the world of half its beauty. I cannot rid myself of the repressing thought; but, if a stranger to-day, I am fortunately alone, and that compensates for much; alone to-day in a wild-wood road, and it is now Indian summer.

It is a long, narrow roadway, with a deep ditch on each side and no special side path for the pedestrian. It is assumed by the travelling community that two vehicles never meet, and the man on foot who meets a wagon must jump into the thicket that hems him in or be run over. So it seemed, at least, until the unexpected wagon did appear, when I found the problem might be solved by climbing over, but I preferred jumping, the ditch, and did so. The teamster, as he passed, hailed me with "What you lost?" and set me down as a liar when I told him "Nothing." No one could be in such a place without an errand, so he thought, and I had no gun to suggest the hunter. But I had an errand, and before the day was done found I had lost much in not having come to this wildwood road years ago.

Thoreau has said, "Nature gets thumbed like an old spelling-book," but by how many? Carry fringed gentian to town, and by the gaping crowd you will be thought to have plucked it from some garden enclosure or found a hothouse door unlocked. I am surprised at Thoreau's remark the more because my path has so seldom led me among these asserted familiars of the out-door world. On the contrary, how all-prevalent is ignorance and unusual is earth-knowledge! To be of the earth earthy is beyond question preeminently desirable, and yet how generally we study to keep clear of it, lest the black soil may spot our clothing, or, sinking deeper, stain the immaculate whiteness of our ignorance. Nature is like a spelling-book, as Thoreau has suggested, but put our spelling-book in the hands of a Hottentot and what does he find? We are too generally Hottentots in this regard; adepts at misinterpretation, or, fearing a lurking devil in every shadow, huddle in the glaring light and distort every straight line and rob of beauty every one with a graceful curve. The pages of nature's spelling-book may be smeared, rumpled, and dog's-eared,—too often they are,—but how often are they seriously studied? We hold it upside down, or study the title-page and turn away, posing as philosophers. It is well to dig, but all the bones in a quarry will not make a naturalist of you if they are merely bones, and the mind's eye cannot see them reclothed in the flesh. This is thumbing the book and never learning to spell even a-b, ab. So far Thoreau was right. But this is Indian summer and no time to preach or grumble, but to meditate. This golden renaissance will teach you a great deal upon one condition: you must be passive and let the knowledge come to you.

Indian summer is timid. Her efforts to reclothe the earth with gladness are not free from doubt. Every ray of reviving sunshine is on the alert lest it be attacked by lurking north winds. Few birds in November sing with a May-day confidence, but they do sing, and this passing hour I have seen seventeen different species of birds, and, except in two cases, several individuals of each species, and not for one second has there been silence. At least the crows were to be heard, and what a hearty, whole-souled chatter theirs is! The subject under discussion by them is seldom to be determined, but now they are scolding at a hawk that has sailed by, and it heeds them but little. A mere dip of the wing and this master of flight is above or below its tormentors, or, with a quick movement of both wings, it rushes far beyond the crows, and now is heard a wild, triumphant cry that thrills me to the very finger-tips. But not all the world's life is now in the upper air. There are birds as much at home in the bushes as are hawks in the clouds, and I turn to them at their invitation, but as quickly bid them adieu when sounds that smack of novelty fill the air. The genial sunshine has warmed the quiet waters by the wood road, and all the chill has left the broad patches of gray-green sphagnum, and now the chorus of a hundred frogs recalls the like warm days of early April when I wander to the meadows. I can scarcely detect these frogs, however closely I look. They still cling suspiciously close to mother earth, but from their doubting throats rises a thanksgiving that floats away like a misty cloud and dies in the silence of the upper air. Again and again I hear it, and then the trembling leafless twigs and rattle of frost-defying leaves gives warning that the sunshine has met its old enemy, the wind, and the frogs sink back to their hidden homes.

Were it not for floating masses of thick, white clouds that shut out the warmth for the moment there would be even more continuous sound these late autumn days. Everything seems to depend upon it. I have often noticed how quickly a bird will cease to sing the moment it is in the shade and how promptly it resumed its song when the bright sun-rays fell upon it. It is really, I think, a matter of warmth rather than the amount of light, but during uniformly cloudy days there is less disposition to sing than when the weather is bright. In short, take the year through, it is a matter of silence in shadows and melody in the sunlit air. While still lingering by the wayside pool and watching a slight ripple on the still surface, a turtle popped its head above the water and gazed about in every direction. I made no motion and so passed for a stick, one of the many hundreds about me. What it thought of the outlook is a matter of doubt in my mind, but following so soon after the chorus of re-awakened frogs, it doubtless wondered what all that noise was about, and looked at the world with its own eyes, to determine the truth of the matter. Perhaps it set the frogs down as liars, for the turtle quickly disappeared, and, though I waited long, saw it no more.

It was a short-long journey that I went to-day—short as the crow flies; long if measured by its wealth of suggestiveness. This swamp, that I would covered thousands of acres, is but a matter of a few hundred, and these will soon be drained, deforested, and despoiled of all its nature-given glory. It is an idle fancy to suppose it foreknows its doom, but so lavish was it of all its beauties it seemed as if hopeful that its brave showing would prove effectual to its preservation. Bright color is not solely a feature of summer or of early autumn leaves; I found it in this solitary swamp, where every leaf had fallen. Bitter-sweet, fruit laden and so fiery red that the air seemed to glow with heat about it. The summer long this plant had been an unpretending vine, that mingled its green leaves with the common crowd of rank weeds, and gave no hint of its superiority. In the fast and furious struggle for supremacy while the warm days of feverish sunshine lasted, it was content to slowly build for the future, and not then and there exhaust itself in merely overtopping its neighbors, and what of the sequel? Now, in these glorious mid-November days, these bird-full, musical days of misty sunshine and rejuvenating warmth, the vine, that had so long been overlooked, is the chief glory of the roadside.

THE EFFECTS OF A DROUGHT

FROM July 6 to October 31, 1895, both inclusive, a period of one hundred and eighteen days, there were but seven during which brief showers occurred, no one exceeding one-tenth of an inch of rain; and there were four days when there was prolonged, heavy precipitation, not exceeding in any instance seven-tenths of an inch; and three days, or parts of twenty-four consecutive hours, when fog condensed and a drizzle, or "Scotch mist," prevailed.

The more prolonged rains occurring September 26 and October 13 caused little brooks, that had been dry for several weeks, to "run" for forty-eight hours, but there was no freshening of the weeds or grass on either upland or meadow. About our dooryards and along the headlands, even where shaded by rank weed-growths and the fences, the ordinary grass was brittle, brown, and resting flat upon the earth. Before the beginning of September the landscape had a scorched appearance, this applying also to the foliage of several species of deciduous trees. By this time, too, the last trace of surface moisture had disappeared from the ordinarily wet or "mucky" meadows.

During this time, even at its close, I did not notice any appreciable diminution of the volume of water flowing from the hill-side and meadow-surface springs, although I learned that many wells had partly or wholly failed. But, in all cases save one that I examined, the water did not pass over its usual course and join ordinarily permanent brooks, and through them reach the river. The extremely dry ground immediately about the springs absorbed the entire outflow at greater or less distances from their sources. Of course, near the springs there was the usual luxuriance of aquatic and semi-aquatic vegetation, and, what is of interest to the Zoologist, an abnormal abundance or overcrowding of animal life in these oasitic areas.

The continued presence of animal life depends upon the food-supply. It is equally evident that no form of animal life can survive for any protracted period an absence of moisture. During the prevalence of the drought heavy dews doubtless afforded a sufficiently copious morning draught to slake the thirst for a period of twenty-four hours, and so met the needs of small mammals, as mice and shrews, and birds, like sparrows, but ordinarily these same creatures drink much oftener than once a day. But this briefly moist condition of the dawn and early morning hours was not of itself sufficient to keep the wide range of animal life in health or comfort, and the result was a migratory movement from the drier uplands to the moister meadows; a noticeable depletion of the fields and overcrowding of the marshes. This was not suddenly brought about, but rather gradual, and would not probably have been noticed except by one daily upon the scene. The parched vegetation had, of course, its effect upon seed-eating birds, but probably a more marked one upon insect life. Certainly the insect-eating birds left their old haunts to a great extent and were found in unusual abundance along the two creeks that divide the meadows into three great tracts; and it was noticeable during the evening that bats and night-hawks were more abundant over the meadows than the fields. Mice and hares certainly were unusually scarce in the uplands. Here, it should be remembered, no observations were practicable that gave positive results. No census could be taken of the life in the two localities, and every statement is one of general impressions gained by almost daily visits to the more important points. One unquestionable fact was ascertained: there was an unusual abundance of life of every kind in the lowlands, and a quiet, desolate condition of the fields above, wholly different from what obtains in ordinary summers. As the weeks rolled by, the smaller meadow streams failed entirely, and hundreds of acres of land, usually more or less wet the year through, became as dry, parched, and desert-like as the sandiest field in the higher ground. Aquatic and semi-aquatic plants withered and died. The rose mallow failed to bloom, arrow-leaf wilted, and the pickerel weeds were soon as brown as sedges. This condition necessitated a second migratory movement of many forms of life, but was fatal to others. Such creatures as took refuge in pools found when too late their means of escape cut off and perished. Small minnows, young salamanders, and even aquatic insects gradually succumbed, and their dried remains were found resting upon the parched mud, which became quite hard, sustaining an ordinary foot-press without retaining any mark thereof. Lifting the mummified remains from their resting-place, there were found impressions of each, distinct in almost every feature. It was instructive as showing how fossils are formed, and further so, in indicating how animals not associated in life become accumulated in small areas. In one such dried-up pool I found a mouse, a star-nosed mole, and remains of many earthworms, as well as fish, batrachians, and insects. Just why the mouse and mole should have remained there and died can only be surmised. But, to return to the uplands: a more striking instance of the effects of the drought was to be seen in a small stream known as Pond Run. This is fed by scattered springs; is a stream of perhaps an average depth of six inches and a width of two or three feet. Sudden dashes of rain swell the volume of waters, but this accession is as rapidly run off. In ordinary summers the volume is reduced to considerably below the estimated average measurements, but the stream has seldom before been known to be absolutely dry throughout its course. For a period of five weeks the water from the springs along its valley were insufficient to give it running water, and in many cases there was no perceptible moisture at the fountain-heads. As the water gradually disappeared, that portion of the stream's fauna dependent wholly upon moisture—as fish, turtles, and batrachians—collected in the pools, particularly those beneath bridges, and there, by overcrowding, soon poisoned the water, to which no fresh supply was being added. It might be asked why these animals, except the fish, did not seek other and healthier localities, but the reason is plain. Everywhere about them was an arid region exposed to a tropical temperature into which they did not dare to venture. Again, while lingering in the pest-holes into which they had gathered, they had gradually undermined their strength and were too weak to travel when, if ever, it occurred to them to do so.

And now back to the meadows. The last general migratory movement was to the tide-water flats, and here, of course, the moisture and vegetation were unaffected, and I have never seen so crowded a condition as that in which were many of the streams that were never quite dry at even the lowest stage of the tide. The carnivorous fishes waxed fat, for there was an available minnow ever in front of every pike, perch, and bass; and the grasshoppers, driven to the creek banks, where alone there was green herbage, were continually leaping into the stream, and were snapped up before they could reach the opposite shore. There was here, however, not such an accession of batrachian life, frogs in particular, as might have been expected, and I failed to notice any undue number of the mud minnow (*Umbra limi*). This fact led me to make a few examinations of the parched or semi-desiccated areas. I found in two locations, that I had never before known to become dry, that frogs, of three species, and the mud minnow had buried themselves where there still remained moisture, but with a crust of dry earth above it. These frogs and fish were like hibernating animals when exhumed,—*i.e.*, soundly asleep, rather than dead, and all slowly revived when placed in clear, cool water. I estimated that they had been in their cramped quarters for at least three weeks. Two weeks later, I hunted for others, but failed to find them; but the day after the first prolonged rain I found the mud minnows in their usual abundance in this same brook, which now had about one-half its ordinary flow of water, and the frogs were dozing on the banks and leaping into the stream as unconcernedly as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Possibly the above simple narration of certain facts may seem to be of no special interest or importance, but there were two features of it that do not appear to have been treated of in general natural histories: the self-inhumation of the fish and frogs and the wonderful promptness of the return of life to the temporarily depopulated areas. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that as long as these inhumed animals could retain their moisture they could preserve their lives. Both the frogs and this one fish can withstand prolonged deprivation of food. I have tried the cruel experiment in one instance, and a mud minnow had no food for seven weeks, and had only lost two-fifths of its weight when it died. As this is a period longer than the duration of any drought on record, when fish-sustaining streams were actually dry, it goes to show that this species is better prepared than any other to accommodate itself to certain geological changes when they come about. Curiously enough, the mud minnow looks more like a fossil than an ordinary brook minnow, is the sole representative of its genus, and is the only species of fresh-water fish found in both Europe and America.

While the drought destroyed much life, it more largely deported it, and I have, in many years of wandering about my home, seen nothing more positively wonderful than the promptness with which every nook and corner was repopulated when the autumn rains came. Vegetal as well as animal life responded at once. The fish were promptly in the brooks, the aquatic salamanders under the flat stones, and the frogs in their places; and on many an afternoon of sunny October days I heard their croaking, as if thankful for the return of the old-time conditions.

During the summer of 1896, there was a more abundant precipitation during the months of June and July, and the area described in the foregoing pages was not so soon affected by lack of water; but the annual drought, though delayed, came at last, and I was, of course, curious to note its effects and compare notes with the preceding summer. Herein I was disappointed, for, to all appearances, there had been going on anticipatory movements on the part of the same forms of life observed in 1895; and before the upland brooks and swamps were dry, and only the margins of springs were constantly wet, all animal life had sought the tide-water areas, where the evil effects of drought could not reach them. I found no fish entrapped in pools without outlets, or a single sleeping, mud-encased frog or minnow. The general aspect, zoologically, of many an upland tract was that of an "azoic" desert, suggesting that no living creature had ever been here; and, truly, there is no more melancholy sight than the dry bed of a brook which for ten months of the year is the scene of active life in endless forms. I had rather wander among skeletons in an opened graveyard than take my outing in the track of a deserted watercourse. Nothing was gained by the comparison of the conditions of the one summer with the other, for it is beyond belief that the life that was discommoded by the drought really anticipated it. I suppose the change was more gradual than in 1895, and no form of life was caught napping. I should have made daily observations for more than a month, walking ten miles every morning and evening, and I did nothing of the kind; and it is only by unremitting effort and an abundance of early morning courage that really valuable observations can be made. A leisurely outlook, at your convenience, may be very pleasant, but do not generalize upon what you see under such circumstances.

To return to our subject: if the phenomenon of a drought became an established condition, a migratorial movement from upland to meadow would soon become established; just as every year there is a transitionary flight of sparrows of several species from the upland fields to the low-lying meadows. This is, I suppose, a question among themselves of food-supply, the crop of seeds failing in the fields first because there they are earlier to ripen.

There was, however, one feature of the past summer that had peculiar interest. For eight days in August (5–12) we had the hottest "spell" ever known. The thermometric readings have been higher in other years, but this is not everything: all the conditions are to be considered, the hygrometric especially, and in this instance it can be safely said that no record exists of continued heat when wild-life was so generally affected and the weather, as a whole, so nearly that of the equatorial tropics. As a whole, the effect of the heat, as I observed it, was a stupefying one. It produced a languor that while withstood by such wild animals as rabbits, mice, and chipmunks, made them inert and much more easily outstripped in a race. This was notably so in the case of the jumping, the short-tailed meadow, and the white-footed mouse; not one of which, it may be said, is akin to the typical house mouse. In several instances, the land tortoise, though it was sheltered by dead leaves and in the shady woods, was very noticeably indisposed to move about. In the range of my rambles there was a marked period of rest, as we may call it, from 10 A.M. to 4

P.M., that recalled the prolonged mid-harvest noonings of the farmer's help; but, besides this, the heated term in question really affected wild-life throughout the night as well. Certainly there was a marked difference in the activity of all furred creatures. The difference in temperature between noon and midnight did not always rouse even the flying-squirrels to their wonted nocturnal activities. If the temperature of those August days was prolonged to sixty or ninety days, and of regular occurrence, migration or æstivation would be brought about,—more probably the latter. Something akin to it can be traced, if our investigations are thorough, even now. Whatever may be its cause, the drought appears to have become an established condition, but varying as to time, of each summer. It is more marked now than a century ago, and the question arises, Is it the initial step towards a change of climate, to a wet and dry season, rather than the present dual condition of warm and cold?

A single entertaining incident relieved the scene of desolation,—for these strong terms are certainly applicable to a region affected by even this less prolonged drought of 1896.

I found a philosophical toad, housed in a very unique fashion. Crows had pecked a hole in an early maturing watermelon and then turned it over in order that the seeds might fall out or gravitate to the opening, as the pulp of the melon slowly decayed. This is an old trick of these birds that is so ingenious that I am more than ever their friend in spite of the mischief done. A few melons less, but does the entertainment afforded by the birds go for nothing? When I made the discovery there was little more than the wrinkled rind left, draped inside with an abundance of very red paper. The toad—a very old one from appearance—had taken up his abode in the melon, and to see him sitting at the door of his home, contemplating the drying up of creation, was extremely funny. Everybody that I brought to the spot had something to say about Diogenes and his tub, and I gave up all intention of writing on this subject. Diogenes was in everybody's mouth, even to high-school girl graduates of the current summer. That toad led to more display of classical knowledge than I had previously discovered in the conversation of my friends. I considered the toad from a purely zoological stand-point. The creature was in truth a philosopher. The sweet edges of the opening in the melon attracted insects, and so the toad had food, shelter, and a safe retreat from the scorching temperature so associated that no physical exertion was required to meet all life's demands.

WINTER-GREEN

THE woods in winter are as thick with short sermons as ever in June they are obscured by green leaves. The mercury fell to zero in the night and the ground is as a rock, yet I found an unfaded, thrifty plant that made no sign of discouragement and looked up as confidently as violets in May. Winter-green; and when so much is in the name itself, why say more? A thrifty growth that defies the frost and adds its mite to the cheerfulness about it, whatever the conditions. How much winter-green breaks through our habitual crustiness!

Seen from afar, perhaps the old woods looked dreary; but who ever fathomed the merit and merriment beyond a wrinkled face until circumstances led us to break through the restraining frown? To him who is a stranger to them, the woods in winter are forbidding. Advances cannot come from them. Have they ever come from you? I went into the woods this morning with a light heart because every old oak was a life-long companion, and the glinting sunshine was their smiles, and not mere glitter of the sun beyond. We lose in part our grip upon enjoyment when we cease to make believe, child-fashion. Seeing the winter-green, I fancied it was spring; and then came mosses and greenbrier and the chatter of a squirrel. What, then, did it matter where the mercury went? It might disappear without affecting these pleasant February foretastes of what is near at hand. There was not a forbidding feature within sight; and while I dallied with the thread-like mosses clinging to the trees there came by that delightful songster of the round year, a Carolina wren. There was never weather so foul but this bird has a pleasant word to speak of it. It came, it sang, it conquered. There was neither cold, nor gloom, nor evidence of more cheerful days in time past, when the wren, perched upon a bending branch of spicewood, uttered all the happiness of its unchanging heart. That song could have held back the darkness. Had it, too, found the winter-green? Stay!

Can it be possible that I heard the creaking of a rusty sign-board, and this Carolina wren was born of my inner consciousness? Such a suggestion came recently from an ornithologist! What if the scales were to drop from my eyes, only to find that here in my home, on these old meadows, there never was a bird, and the region was in its primeval, azoic condition? How the fellow would rejoice! As for me, I am glad that the ornithologist's soulless birds, mere bones and feathers, keep away.

I followed a narrow wood-path that led me into the very depths of the forest; but green leaves were still about me, and now I heard a chatter as if some hidden friend were laughing at me, and the blue-jay and golden-winged woodpecker were near at hand and questioning me rather than I them. They, too, laughed at this zero weather, and the woodpecker tapped on the hollow branch of a primeval oak; tapped and rattled with all his might, and then turned to me as if for applause. Then away to still more remote recesses in the wood, laughing all the while. I remembered the winter-green, and laughed, too. For a while, as I stood there, the woods were silent. I had a vivid impression for the moment that it was really winter and intensely cold. If I had suffered it would have been my own fault wholly, for he who truly loves an outing can keep all ugliness in the background. It requires no magician's wand. I looked again for winter-green and found it, and there, too, was the bush-nest of white-footed mice. I startled them from their snug retreat and gave chase, and, after a brisk dash through the underbrush, came off captor. Now, it is well at times to be as savage as ever was palæolithic man, who lived ages ago on this very spot, but stop this side of murder. Follow the game as closely, as persistently, as the hound follows the fox, but, at the final moment, offer the hand of fellowship rather than the fangs of destruction. The former merely ends the chapter, with sweeter ones to follow; the latter ends a tragedy of but one act, and leaves the survivor unworthy of himself. I carried the captive mouse back to his home, but held him awhile before setting him down at his own door. What a gain it would have been could I have translated the glitter of his black eyes! Was it fear or rage? I judge the former, for the poor thing trembled, and when I set it down it ran, not into its house, but to a prostrate log, and disappeared under dead leaves. I certainly had not gained its confidence, and when I come this way again it will not be caught napping. No matter how gently I move, it will never believe I did not intend it harm. Its first impressions, like our own, are stamped with indelible ink that will shine through the varnish of all subsequent experiences. Perhaps I dulled the winter-green for the day of that one mouse, but I had brightened my own. No incident, however trifling, should be lost upon us, and my pulses were thrilled with a healthier joy than the hunter had experienced, who had passed me by, laden with furs from his traps. The recent flood had worked destruction to the muskrats, and not a mink or raccoon or opossum but had fled from the drowned meadows. They were hiding in these woods, so the trapper told me, but I had not seen them. Not one of them but is more cunning than a mouse, but I do not know that they could have taught me any more had I met them in my path. They have not greater significance because of their size, and are too apt to rouse the savage instinct that was the only impulse of primitive man. But I kept more upon the alert when again alone, and thought every scratch of the ground was the footprint of an animal. Not a bunch of leaves but moved as might a wildcat or a skulking coon. I had ceased to ramble and turned hunter, but the merriest of all our winter birds recalled me to my better senses. The crested tit whistled *here! here!* and looking up I saw green leaves upon the climbing smilax, and looking down, winter-green was waving above fresh mosses that had not been fingered by the blighting frost. There was not a feature of the thick woods but wore a smile; and that strange bird, by its magic, conjured up every songster within hearing, and jays, cardinals, kinglets, and chickadees came to the very tree upon which he perched. The old oak was an aviary, and what gladness rang through the old woods, which are said to be deserted and dreary even unto desolation in winter! Did I carry winter-green into the town, I would be told it came from a hot-house. Well, it did not come from the death-like regions of your supposition, a lifeless wood in winter. I never saw such a place. With the mercury at zero, there was still abundant life, abundant winter-green, abundant incident about which to ponder, as I pass down the long, varying line of days that make my changeful years.

THE WITCHERY OF WINTER

"IF a walk in winter is not simply stumbling over the graves of a dead summer's darlings, what, pray, is it?" In some such way ran the remark of a man who had seen our winters only from car-windows or those of his house on the city's street. It is not strange that he held such an opinion. Not even a sleigh-ride affords a fair view of the world in winter. We must be free to move if we would be free to see, and only when on foot and we have the freedom of the fields as well as of the highways can we know what winter really means, and by winter I mean weather that requires us to make war upon the wood-pile. Winter is the crystallization of a summer. A fixedness and quiet now replace the flowing river and music of the many birds that sang throughout its valley. Now are the days of slender shadows that streak the dull gray ground or send narrow lines of darkness over the untrodden snow. The shades of leafy summer are shrunken. There are dimly lighted nooks where cedars cluster and crannies that are well defended by the frozen ferns, but light is all-pervading, in a general sense, and how wide open alike are the fields and forest! The opened door is an invitation to enter, but how slow are we to accept the invitation of winter, when the leafy curtains are withdrawn and the world more than ever open to inspection! Are we to be forever afraid to look through the bare twigs to the sky above, lest we see the new moon barred by a branch and so tremble for our luck? The naked beam and rafter of Nature's temple are not desolate as the ruins of man's handiwork, for we know that their covering will be renewed in due season. Trees, indeed, in their undress uniform are none the less natural and forever retain their individuality. The wrinkles of their bark are their autographs, and we should learn to read them.

But what is winter to me? The brook, the leafless trees, the frozen grass, and all hungry life, whether bird or beast, protest, but I find no reason to complain. My

needs are never many, and I have no sense of want when "fun in feathers," the crested tit, bears me company. We met this morning at the three beeches, and wandered together down the wood road to the edge of the meadow. I have been walking here for so many years there is danger of repetition if I mention to-day; but no, Nature is never a repetition. The fault lies with ourselves if this is apparently true. Nature cares nothing for us, and we must force her to smile if we would be at all favored. The wind has other errands than to whistle for our amusement; no storm ever passed by on the other side because of our presence. All that we learn comes from our own efforts; we must wrest Nature's secrets from her; she neither invites us nor volunteers any information. Every day has its own history, and the friends of yesterday are often more companionable to-day. Certainly my jolly, crested tit has gained since first we met, and now is nearer perfection than ever before. I am sure of this, and yet much may be due to a clearer insight as to what a bird really is. Is my companion bird ever convinced I have no weapon about me? Tame as he is, he never destroys the bridges behind him. I cannot quite gain his confidence. I fancy if some of us could see ourselves as birds see us, with what a sense of degradation would we be overwhelmed! Seldom is it that we are not greeted, by every bird we meet, as a red-handed murderer. An exception to-day, however, for this jolly tit was socially inclined. He peeped over his shoulder as I drew near; called out to me as I was about to pass by, and so we exchanged "good-mornings" as friend to friend. It is difficult to decide whether man or bird was really the leader, we kept so near together as we passed to the end of our woodland journey.

It needs but some such incident as this to give us insight as to winter's real character. There can come no impression of death or desolation when, as we pass, we have birds hailing us from every tree-top, and is it not significant that our smallest bird, save one, braves our severest weather? Yet we muffle ourselves in endless wraps and rush frantically from shelter to shelter when the mercury ranges low, as if the frost of a midwinter day was as fatal as some devouring flame.

There is a pretty outlook at the edge of the woods, and never more attractive than when the snow lightly covers the grass, and every tall rush and sedge and berry-laden bush stands forth in greater beauty because of the glistening background; and here, red as our brightest berry, the cardinal shone on the bare twigs as the gayest midsummer blossom. Now here is wealth sufficient for any rambler's needs, and greater would prove an embarrassment. There can be too many birds at one time, as witness the warblers on May-day. You are easily lost in a crowd, but what is more charming than a quiet chat with a friend? My crested tit had left me, but here was the kinglet still, and now a sprightly cardinal had come. He, too, is most excellent company, but how seldom disposed to be confiding! The safety of a thicket must ever be at hand and never an instant that his eyes are not upon you. It is very humiliating, but though our meetings are always marred in this way, there is still abundant pleasure in them. To-day the cardinal whistled a wild note that ought to have waked the echoes in the sleepy hills,—a clear, fife-like call, as if it would rouse the slumbering trees and make the grass green again; but the cardinal's magic reached me only, and I forgot that it was winter.

There is a livelier thrill to every pulse-beat when saluted in such hearty fashion. We are of one mind, this cardinal and I, and agree that winter needs to be better understood. Here at my feet is a frozen and forlorn fern, but it is green still, if it no longer waves gracefully as a feather in the passing breeze; accept it for what it recalls to-day, and be not forever fretful because summer could not stay and protect it. Every crisp, brown leaf that has fallen from the oaks has its own story to tell. Have you listened yet to know how charming it really is? Here among them, too, are acorns in endless numbers,—large and small ones; brown, green, and mottled ones. Here, where squirrels have been feasting in the cheerful warmth of winter sunshine, I, too, can find comfort, even playing with acorn-cups for an hour, and so again a child. There is no cause for discontent in a winter that merely sports with the tip of your nose or stiffens your ears. Are you going to retreat at such an assault, and, showing a white flag, hurry to the fireside? Such winter days ought to bring out one's true self, and just so far as the weather is hearty be the same. Meet it half-way, and what we should fear of it will never come to pass. Winter finds us such easy prey that it reaches the heart. Summer there, and you are well armed. Neither the winter of each returning year nor the stealthy winter of age can, thus armed, ever claim you captive. But let Nature preach; it is not man's forte. No sermon fits the sunshine of a clear December day other than one of its own reading; and the frozen meadow can speak directly to you, and will, if you are disposed to listen. There will be no waste of words, no rhetorical flourishes, but a plain exposition of what is transpiring, and why. It is not always that we ask intelligent questions, and Nature is quite certain to resent the inquisitiveness of idle curiosity. The mystery of Nature is only the lack of our ability to comprehend her. Much of what is imputed to Nature as a mysterious quality is really a lack of brains on our own part.

The frozen meadow was beautiful, but I lingered in the woods. There is a feeling of companionship when among old trees that is less pronounced among the weeds and grass; a circle of the elect in one case, the common crowd in the other; but this is unkind to the honest weeds in the meadow. But I was not alone with the trees. I startled deer-mice that leaped in a bewildered way from their bird-nest homes, and what a tumult in a decayed log when I sent a great puff of smoke through the many tunnellings of the rotten tree-trunk now occupied by fat, lazy meadow mice!—those that have the long runways in the grass and burrows besides, deep into the ground, into which they precipitately flee when too close pressed. It is only of recent date that I have found these creatures entertaining.

They have hitherto been stupid and I have often passed them by without a second glance, but a touch of frost wakens them to a livelier pace, and then, as it was to-day, they are worthy game for the fun-loving rambler. When these mice sit up, with a berry in their forepaws, and look inquiringly about as you draw near, they have as much character as any squirrel, and are very like the marmots of the far West in their general appearance, though infinitely smaller. Mice that make merry on the frozen grass and can squeak defiance to the prowling hawk are no mean feature of a winter outlook.

And the hawk itself,—a pale-blue harrier that with matchless grace swept the weed-tops,—what a feature to any landscape! I had been thinking well of the poor mice that fled in terror from me and made much of them for the time, but how quickly forgotten were they in the presence of a hawk! It is not strange, but is it wise to be thus easily led from the lesser to the greater object? Rid yourself of preconceptions, and study both hawk and mouse without prejudice, and is there greater nobility in the feathers than in the fur? Is the commanding murderer more to be commended and admired and copied than the murdered mouse? If closely questioned we say "no" to the bystanders, and yet we are as well aware as are our hearers that we are lying. In spite of all good intentions, we are forever following and applauding the tyrant in his feathers and forgetting the toiling mice in their furs. So, to-day; so, yesterday; so it will always be; and the injustice of it flourishes as the weeds that we are ever scotching and never kill.

The summer's heat and the summer's shade are gone, but the solid earth remains. The footprints of a ramble of long ago are still to be traced along this woodland path, and I stand in these again. The trees, the shrubbery, the hill-side and meadow, the winding creek and resistless river, are all still here,—changed, yet the same. Nor do I alone represent the life of this charmed spot. There are birds about me,—birds that whisper glad tidings as they chirp near by; birds that pipe a merry strain whenever the bare twigs rattle; birds that scream their delight from cloud-land. In all that I see and hear there is no trace of the fault-finder's peevish moan. All is hearty; all is cheerful. The world is accepted as it is, and it is no vain conceit to speak with confidence of the witchery of winter.

COMPANY AND SOLITUDE

I.

"COMPANY."

WHEN I was a child, there was no word in our language more expressive to me of all that was mildly terrible than "company." It meant unreasonable restraint, and the necessity of spotless clothing, a painfully stiff collar, and clean hands,—everything, in fact, that a small boy of average health and spirits naturally detests. Then, too, there was the showing off of infantile accomplishments, and a general disarrangement of every childish idea of comfort. I learned at five to detest "company," and at fifty I have not outgrown the impressions then acquired. I do not like company. Not that I am afraid of strangers, nor that, being a householder, I am inhospitable; but "company"—well, I am at a loss to express my real meaning. I remember an old neighbor, an uncouth creature, a contemporary of my grandfather, who was accustomed to declare that a brief call was a "vis," to spend the day, a visit, and to stay overnight, a visitation. This may not have been original with him, but it was a pithy way of putting the matter, and has been my law and gospel on this subject ever since.

Of what earthly use is "company"? You probably see your neighbors once a week, meeting them on the public highways, and if you nod pleasantly, and speak a word or two of the weather and of the health of the family, has not everything been done that necessities require or formality can reasonably demand? If you have business or need information that others can give you, go and ask of them. Be brief, but to the point, and, leaving with what is desired, carry away also their blessing. To go to another's house, to request of its inmates, one or all, to sit for half an hour or longer and listen to your platitudes, and, coming away, lie to them about a pleasant call, is intolerable. Yet there are thousands who do this daily. Why should I leave my occupation, be it loafing even, and give my attention to some man or woman who is thoughtless enough to "call"? The actuating motive never appears. Much is spoken and nothing said. I receive no worthy thought to profit by or increase the probability of a beatific eternity. The familiar well-gnawed bones of doctrine fall from the devil's table. Usually I am forced to breathe, at such a time, a gossip-poisoned atmosphere. This "call" is another's idea of civility, and I am compelled, it appears, to be a victim of his or her whim. If I refuse, as I have done point-blank, to present myself, I am called a boor and all manner of ugly names. Well, is it not better to be called black as night, and know that you have the whiteness of mid-day in your heart, than to be called civil, while you are cursing the thoughtlessness of the company that has called? That is my view of the matter.

The world professes to hold in righteous indignation a hypocrite; but how are we to escape hypocrisy if we become the slaves of company? It has often been said that the set phrases of formal social customs are understood by everybody and no harm is done.

Perhaps so, but I am concerned more with the harm I do myself than with that I cause to others. If I have one possession above another that I value, it is my time, my living, my concerns with myself; and there is no surplusage to be bestowed upon formalities that bring neither pleasure nor profit and do not redound to my credit in any way in which the subject can be looked at. I insist that there is nothing churlish in this view. I have not those in mind whom I call my friends, but the average caller, the "company" that is dying—but, alas, never dies—to know what your most secret thoughts have been that day, so that he or she may announce them to some other victim of his or her calling list. This is not evidence that I am averse to a lively chat over the fence with my next-door neighbor, nor that I do not love to discuss old times with a former playmate when we meet. All such occurrences—and they have an added charm when happening by chance—are delightful and of quite another character: they are as honest, outspoken, and hearty as that sweetest music in the world, the laughter of childhood. The frankness of a pleasant meeting is as refreshing and soul-satisfying as the formalities of "company" are arid and degrading.

We had company to-day. I was asked for,—as if one victim were not sufficient,—and, as often happens, declaring I would not appear, appeared. Luckily my memory was in working order, and I put it to a severe test. Now, an hour after the plague had ceased to trouble by its presence, the soft, sibilant, loud whisperings remain. The company took just fifty minutes to inform me that I was looking well; that I was looking extremely well; that I never looked better. Pleasant sounds, doubtless, are such words to those who are really ill, notwithstanding their inapplicability; but I am in ordinary health. I was also told that the weather had been unpleasant, very unpleasant, positively disagreeable; and, as I had not been house-bound for a month, this was scarcely complimentary to my powers of observation. All the while, I never opened my lips, unmoved by madam's black looks, which I interpreted aright. The company were persistent, and attacked me from another quarter: Did I think we should have pleasant weather soon? I remained silent for a moment, and was about to reply, when another question was put: Will there be a pleasant summer? This was somewhat staggering. How was I to know the character of the coming season? I smiled, hypocritically of course, and replied that I hoped for pleasant weather in the next world, but did not dare to prophesy as to this. The fools tittered. I supposed I had scored a success at meeting formal company, and was heaving an inaudible sigh of relief, when the guests rose to depart; but it seems that my part was not well done, and madam scolded me for rudeness. I am convinced, now, that I cannot become a successful formalist, and I understand that our callers agree with this. They call me a boor and other significant names; but then, out of the parlor I am abundantly happy, and doubtless my days will not be shortened by my lack of appreciation of their valueless inanities.

Is it, seriously speaking, necessary for one to part company with a bird or a flower, to leave the open air for a stuffy room and miss music and beauty, that a caller may have opportunity to assure you that two and two make four? Even if the caller has knowledge—his alone, it may be—that he is willing to impart, how is he to know that I will value it? It may be that I am wrong,—that such a course, if general, would check the world's progress; but I am not convinced. Who, indeed, are those that have furthered progress so far,—the chattering gad-about, the caller, our "company," or those who value their time and are not willing to sit idly by and be talked at by anybody and everybody who happens to call?

An honest meeting of man with man is usually an accidental one. Often, seeing them approach, for the lane is long and straight, I have hastened to the hill-side, to be rid of the obnoxious callers. Here, if in summer, I let the songs of thrushes entertain me, or, in winter, listen to the titmouse, that is always cheerful, or watch the long lines of roostward-flying crows. I have never yet wearied of this, or found such conditions to lose their suggestiveness. When to-day's company had gone and madam's lecture was ended, I hurried to the farm's most unfrequented corner and rested at the mossy stile, over which so few pass these later years, for the once well-worn foot-path is now torn yearly by the plough. While I tarried, I was hailed by a hearty man who lives close to nature.

"Have you heard the eagles scream to-day?" he asked.

"No," I replied: "are there any about?"

"Do you think I would ask you what I did, if it was an impossible thing?" he replied, with a trace of anger in his voice.

I was deservedly snubbed. Here was a man who knew every nook and corner of the land, every tree, bush, flowering plant, beast, and bird; and to think that I should have expressed a doubt of his sincerity! That trifling "company" had been too much for me. I looked my regrets, and the old man read my eyes.

"Yes," he said, in his usual earnest manner, "there was a grand pair of eagles here at sunrise, and they screamed until the hill-side trembled with their rage. They soared until out of sight, and then came swooping down until the tree-tops were moved by their wings, and all the time one or the other screamed till you would have thought their throats would crack. Not another bird along the hill-side opened its bill. It was as still as winter, till they were gone, miles down the river; and then what a chatter the crows set up! You might have thought they had driven the eagles off and were crowing over their victory."

This is such knowledge as I am ever ready to receive. I am always on the lookout for eagles, and my friend has been more fortunate than I. His wealth he is ready to divide, seeing it does not diminish by so doing. I am the gainer, yet he is not a loser. Such meetings make me thankful I am not alone in the world. But what had I to offer as an equivalent? He had given me also of his time, which I knew was held at its full value by him, and was I to receive this as a gift? I was humbled by the thought that I had not power to make adequate return, and would at least have admitted as much; but my friend could read me as he did the wild world about him, and said, as he turned to leave me, "You are glad to know that I have seen eagles to-day, and I am glad to be able to tell you."

His recompense was the knowledge of having been of use to another. I had not thought of that. Such people have no time to call; for them, there are no moments to be spent in formulating phrases that are empty; but meeting you while on their way, as here at the stile, they bless you with weighty words and leave you wiser than before. We cannot "keep" such company; it is vouchsafed to no one as an every-day feature of his life; but it may sparkle through his years, here and there, like flakes of gold in quartz.

I have argued in this strain for years, finding no one to agree; yet every year strengthens my conclusions. Of course, folks will not cease to "call" until the crack of doom, and many will be on their way to their neighbors when they hear it. They hold themselves as philanthropic people, but I would that every one was to a greater extent misanthropic rather. Speaking for myself, it is a positive pleasure, whenever I think of it, that I grew up a savage. The plain, modest, and compact flower of misanthropy has been too long neglected. Plant it where it will be most often seen, and let its blossoms influence our lives to a greater symmetry.

II.

SOLITUDE.

"Distrust mankind: with your own heart confer,
And dread even there to find a flatterer."

"The foremost object in my experience has always been the ninth letter of the alphabet," I remarked.

"Then you are a crabbed creature, wrapped up in yourself," my companion replied.

"For once you have told the truth; now leave me, please."

What would this room be if there were others in it? Merely a very plain, bare-walled affair; a shelter, for it is raining now, and but little else. But luckily I am alone, and through the distorting panes of greenish glass, through which the light of sunrise in an earlier century penetrated, I look out upon a pretty world. I am alone, and the crowd about me hampers every movement; but did so much as a single human being open the door, and I should be alone in quite another sense. In what men call solitude I have all my friends about me; when in man's presence, all too often, I am literally alone.

I fancy that all work of value or even of idle interest to the world is done in secret. We can praise or blame, admire or detest a crowded street; but what we wish others to know must come to us and be recorded when the crowded street is a mere matter of memory. The ghosts of the dead centuries can peep over my shoulders and peer from every corner of this little room without disconcerting me, but let some mortal in the flesh open the door and my thoughts are as far off as these same ghosts that but a moment ago were grinning at me and I grinning back at them.

It is safe to love a ghost. Though there is a delightful individuality discernible, still they are much like the clay in the potter's hands: we can shape them within reasonable bounds. Exhilarating thought, too; I have not yet met a ghost that was not a gentleman. Of ghosts of the other sex I know nothing, having never seen one. The former are familiar, they are of easy manners, a little roguish at times, and a bit inquisitive, yet never that terror of the flesh, obtrusive. Intuition never deserts the ghost. It reads your thoughts before it enters your presence, and knows to the second when to come and go. These jolly creatures are my best friends, and how can any one be alone when such company is ever at hand, asking no other condition than that your fleshly brethren shall keep in the background? I have accepted their terms, and so, while I love myself above all others in the worldly sense, and to all appearances am concerned with my own thoughts only, and my own whims and their gratification, yet my troop of friends—unseen by others' eyes—are always actually at hand or within the reach of an unworded wish.

Is this not a fitting condition? What can be more ghost-like than an unspoken thought? It is not the less a fact because unseen and unheard. It may not travel to my neighbor and prod his brain to an additional activity, but how quickly it flies to the surrounding outlook and beckons to me a dozen or a hundred ghosts and bids them attend upon me! This makes a monarch of a thoughtful man. See to it that you are a merry monarch, and your happiness is assured.

There is no one beside myself in this small room, and we are given to selecting the most prominent objects when in search of subject-matter for book or essay, and both would often be the better were the minor matters more in evidence. The hero, however great, must have ground to stand upon; but this is often forgotten, and characters come and go in the printed pages as if such a little matter as the world at large was of no importance whatever. But to-night I am alone, and choose myself in preference to others, if I find anything to say. I do not object. That ninth letter of the alphabet always appealed very strongly to me. It is like a cherished personal possession, and whatever may be my occupation at the time, or wherever I happen to be, this same blessed *I* is the most prominent feature of place or circumstance. Whether or not anything to *you*, *I* am everything to myself. The ninth letter and the writer are nearer than twins,—we are one,—and never was there a closer relationship or one that was unruptured by disagreement or marred by misunderstanding. Whatever the limits of my knowledge, I know myself. What the world is, what life is, can only be judged by me through my senses. What you tell me really means nothing. I see with my eyes, hear with my ears, touch with my hands, and distinguish odors with my nose. Your experiences can be nothing to me, except as I compare your report of them with my own impressions. As you may say of yourself, I say of mine: wherever I am, there is the centre of the world; and when I am alone, I am the only man in existence. If another's proximity is not made known to my senses, how may I know that you are still on the earth? Your world may pass away and mine remain. What your world is it does not concern me to know; but my world does fill all my thought, and, projecting myself therein, am filled with its direct impressions upon my senses, myself,—that entity which is most forcibly expressed by a simple letter, I.

There would be less jangling in this world if individuals were given to placing more emphasis upon their own expressions, by continually reminding the hearer that it is himself who speaks, and speaks only for himself. I think, I believe, I know; good, wholesome expressions, these, that lead to no misconceptions. But it is claimed that excessive egotism is tiresome, is inelegant, is evidence of limited intellectuality. Well, it is honesty, it is truthfulness, it is the operation of your own mind, boundless or limited. We were better off, as prehistoric folk, when selfishness was a more marked feature of humanity. The mischief of egotism that has been claimed arises from misconception of self, the incurable malady of feeble minds; of such as the law gives freedom at twenty-one, but which are truly infantile at three-score and ten. Have you encountered no such minds? Do not speak hastily. An affirmative answer is an admission that you are blind.

To do ourselves justice, to fit us to our niche, so that no vacant space shows about us, we must be busy with ourselves, and demand to be excused when weaklings call for a division of our strength. I did not invite myself to this world. He would be a fool who should do that, if it were possible; but here I am. The fact of the entity's presence is incontrovertible, and what does it mean? I do not know. I do not care. No reason for existence ever became apparent, but in time the I within me comes to the fore and overshadows all other facts, and, concerned with it, I struggle to keep my footing on a slippery earth, and, doing so, the thought continually wells up, What of this earth about me? Its multiplicity of details is bewildering, ofttimes exasperating, and my own Ego has learned to shun the complex and seek the simple, to avoid the formal and clasp hands with the true. There is nothing peculiar in this, but the same end is sought by different routes or methods. Nobody really likes the shams of this world, and yet how much ground is planted in the undesirable crop! How came such things into existence? The ever-growing complexity of the problem of human life has much to do with it, I suppose; perhaps all to do with it. The wandering away from a wholesome to a feverish condition of affairs, from the nearness of nature to proximity with the unnatural, has led to distortion, if not of body, of mind, and the asymmetrical growth resulted finally in the few being served by the many; the idle becoming the lords of the busy; the rich, the tyrants of the poor. There are upturnings at times and healthful readjustments. So ugly as all this appears, it might be worse; but the sham, the unreal, the absolutely false, these pass too often for the real, the beautiful, and the true, and the world does not seem aware that it is humbugged. The indifferent individual—the infant of mature years, so to speak—accepts pinchbeck for gold, rhinestones for diamonds, asking only for glitter, and indifferent to the source. The fools, unfortunates through Nature's design or indifference, can, and not infrequently, successfully pose as the favorites of Erudition, and, stealing others' labors, be credited with learning which they do not possess and awarded honors to which they are not entitled. The individual that by chance catches the expressions of those in distant lands and repeats them here as the outcomings of his own brain is all too common. This is a diseased condition that has found a nidus in the overcrowded centres of the world. We have heard much of degeneration of late, and a great hue and cry against the suggestion, but the world in some respects is worse, not better, than it appears, and many an individual with a goodly appearance is thoroughly rotten at the core.

"Who cares what you think, or say, or are?" my neighbor asks.

"I do," I reply: "it is I who is talking to myself." If you care to hear, listen; if not, turn a deaf ear. I am not intruding upon your notice, nor desire to figure in your life even as a shadow crosses your sunshine and is gone. The truth is, you intruded. You broke the silence by your uncalled-for question. You asked me to speak, and, as usual, have only myself about which to converse. But while you tarry, let us be neighborly for a moment, and not, like wandering atoms in emptied space, kick each other into different directions. However wrapped up in one's self, we can be of mutual advantage. You can profit by my blunders; I, by yours.

The storm increases in violence as night draws on apace, and I have now no ghosts to cheer me nor desire to call them up. Even they have sought shelter; and more than ever it is a fitting time to take down "Walden" and read the fifth chapter. Thoreau was in the highest sense an egotist, and so, necessarily, a lover of solitude. This is not taking a pessimistic view concerning ourselves or others. Our limitations call for isolation that we may do ourselves justice, far more frequently than our supposed needs call for company; and unless there is solitude at command and full confidence in our strength, we leave the world as we found it, so far as our presence in it is concerned. Why we should care to have it otherwise is the most strange of all problems that vex our sojourn. It is a serious matter, making life less endurable, to be plagued with ambition. Why I sit on a torturing four-legged chair at my desk when there is an easy rocker front of the andirons is not solvable: it is simply a fact, and an extremely disagreeable one at that. But existence becomes less serious if we can take pleasure in solitude and toy with the puzzles that Nature dangles in front of our faces. Such hours of existence gild a gloomy world; but how few, like Thoreau, can extract the sweets of a quiet evening and be honestly glad that they are living! Some of his distinguished critics could not, or there would not be such wide-spread misconception of the man. To most of us he was, and will always be, an enigma, and the more so, in that petty spite on the part of greatness strove to misrepresent him. In face of such conditions do we "knock ourselves down," as a writer recently said in pointing out the arrogance of one critic who presumed too much when he essayed to comment on such a subject. Even a professional critic can get beyond his depth, and Lowell got far beyond his, and, worse than mere failure, he seems to have forgotten an earlier essay full of praise, and in the later screed failed to conceal the true animus that moved him. But all is well: Thoreau, the lover of solitude, the sane egotist, fills our lives more and more, and leads us to a better conception of the world about us.

OVERDOING THE PAST

ARE we not overdoing history and neglecting the present moment? Periodical literature is overflowing with dilutions, more or less weak, of the elaborate biographies of great men. There is no time allowed us to consider the living present because of the claims of a dead past. We have ceaselessly rung in our ears the wonderful doings of this or that hero: how he, being successful, saved his country; how he, being defeated, the occurrence of continental disaster was prevented. This is all rank rubbish. The world is too powerful for any one man to absolutely control any important portion of it. Even the present Czar has his limitations. It is mere assumption to say that England would have crushed this country had the Revolution failed. We are taught to despise the Tories of 1776, but their arguments were worth listening to, and the loyalist that doubted the loud-mouthed patriotism of Sam Adams was not wholly a fool. England, later, would not have disappeared from the map of Europe had Napoleon gained Waterloo. There is no man living who can prove that the world was the gainer by the actual results of the world's great contests. It is not impossible that we might have gained more had the opposite occurred. It is a matter of speculation only. What our forbears did, if delayed, might have been better done by their descendants; and what they failed to do, believing it a terrible calamity, has never resulted in the direful conditions they predicted. The world works on in a pretty even way, though millions of fretful creatures hurry to and fro as if its weight were on their shoulders. What the man of to-day exults over we may deplore to-morrow, and that condition of affairs over which he grieves to-day we may look upon to-morrow as a blessing. We overrate the importance of individualities; we underrate the world in its entirety. We can draw endless conclusions from the lessons of the past, but we cannot truthfully proclaim any one of them as a demonstration. We can amuse ourselves with peering into the future, as the belated traveller peers into the darkness before him, but we cannot speak with accuracy as to what we see.

To return to current literature. Should we not concern ourselves more with what is daily transpiring, and less with what has been or might have been?

Is not the importance of history overdrawn when it is held up so closely to our faces that we cannot see what a bright world there is behind it? Does it not begoggle our eyes so that the Present is robbed of its beauty? The value of history is unquestionable, but its overvaluation is a greater misfortune than that our yesterdays should forever be utter blanks in our lives. Then, too, the manner of these historical presentments is open to criticism. Their authors are too given to distort a fact for the sake of rhetorical flourish, and every picture of their favorites—without one single exception—is painted in the most glowing colors. Their heroes verge on the angelic, and yet not one of them but was somewhere, somehow, at some time, miserably weak. The human frame is no fit cage for an angelic spirit, and the historical essayists of to-day, that hint at such things as of the past, force Candor to exclaim, Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying!

The correction of all this is the art of appreciation of our immediate surroundings, and an avoidance, as of a pestilence, of depressing retrospection. As it is the atmosphere that is now entering our lungs that gives us life, so let it be the sights and sounds and deeds of the passing moment that give us joy. It is the rose on the bush this bright morning and the song of the wild bird that sounds across the fields, that bid me pause to look and listen. Two centuries ago my people saw and heard the same flowers and birds, but does such a thought really add to the present pleasure? If you permit yourself to drift with the backward current of retrospection, that moment you become blind and deaf, or catch but a fleeting glimpse of some poor ghost, or hear perchance the faintest echo of some dead song. Why press your ear to the ground to fancy you detect the footfalls of preceding greatness? What matters it whether Washington's boots creaked or not? Is there not more in the tramp of the millions who are battling as nobly to-day? It is not belittling the heroes of other days—and it matters nothing if it is—to claim for the present equally heroic men. The condition may not arise to bring them to the fore, but who shall say that they do not exist and merely wait the trumpet call of opportunity? Never a hero fell, but an equal was ready to replace him. What is a hero? A man equal to the hour's emergency, and how many emergencies have not been met? No such pernicious twaddle finds its way to the printed page as the idolatrous laudation of those who have been borne to high places by circumstances they could not control, and gazed upon by all mankind; idolatrous, and therefore degrading so far as it leads to the belief that among ourselves there is no such greatness; that the glory of humanity waxed in this or that hero and has since been waning.

"I cannot agree," says a friend. "It is the function of the daily press to devote itself to the man of the moment. But, for heaven's sake, let us get a little respite from these 'actualities' when we pick up the illustrated monthly magazines! For my part, I should like to have George Washington's life retold in each of the magazines in turn, and then retold again when the last of them had printed it. The value of keeping Napoleon always in evidence were perhaps less obvious. Still, in those aspects of his character in which he was not an example, he was a tremendous warning. The day has not yet come when we can afford to let Washington sleep, or fail to profit by a study of Napoleon's rise to dictatorship." And, again, he says, "It does not appear whether or no Abraham Lincoln is one of your *bêtes noires*. There has been rather more about him in the magazines than about Washington or Bonaparte. To be sure, he has been dead only a third of a century; but he is not one of those 'who are striving at this time to make our lives better worth the living.' Doubtless, though, his example is more potent for good than that of any living man. I should like to know what great and good man of to-day the magazines have neglected, after all?"

I do not see that I am squelched by Brother Quill. My claim is that biography should be written for the benefit of the young just as much if not more than for the delectation of the old. Nothing can improve or affect the latter; and to make little gods of the dead is hurtful, because the living youth knows his own limitations and despairs becoming as good, say, as George Washington, whereas it really requires but little effort to be quite as good and even considerably better. Mere eulogy and parade of transcendent virtue which the individual discussed did not possess is rubbish. Much of the current magazine matter is a sort of goody-goody biography that is not even pleasant reading, and surely not profitable because untrue,—that is, the facts are so stated as to give a wrong impression. What we want is applied biography, not a mere record of a man's sayings and doings; a selection thereof, with their application to the present day and its needs. Essays on characters are better than detailed records of the lives of Tom, Dick, and Harry.

My critic hopes to silence me by naming Lincoln. Is it not peculiarly true of him that we need a guide to the study of his career, and so make practicable the application of the secret of his success to our times? But does the ponderous picture-book, with a portrait on every page, and even portraits of those whose back-yards joined the rear garden-lots of his first cousins, aid us any? I admit that his example is still potent, though he has been dead for thirty years, but it is because there are thousands living who distinctly remember him. Will his biographies, rewritten a century hence, as we now have George Washington doled out to us, help the young reader of one hundred years to come? Not a bit of it. It behooves us to consider our own steps more than the footprints of those who have gone on before. Give me the passing moment, not the dead past, and, too, let us think just a little less of the problematical future; it, if anything, is wholly fitted to take care of itself.

Another of my critics says, "If there are any Washingtons or Lincolns about now, they keep themselves exceedingly close." They certainly do, and why? Because there is not enough interest taken in the present to make them show forth what they really are. Now, this critic, like the other, is an editor, and so supposedly infallible; but I doubt if either will deny that there are not men for the hour, whatever the character of that hour. The existent conditions produce the men required for them, and when the demand is for heroes, heroes will stand forth. In the humdrum conditions of the present merely money-getting days, of what earthly use would a Washington or a Lincoln be? If they applied their talents to the present, as they did to the conditions of their times, they would inevitably take the fatal step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

But this is base ingratitude, some one, having the Revolution in mind, cries out. These men fought and bled for our liberties. Let us think a moment. Is this charge of ingratitude as serious as it sounds? How do we know the heroes of other days did anything of the kind? They have left no record of great concerns as to their great-grandchildren. They did concern themselves with their children, for the latter were then very much in evidence; but here is an ugly fact that confronts those that talk of ingratitude. Never a hero but was concerned more about his own neck than about the necks of those to come after him. The men of troublous times, in years gone by, had their own immediate interests, and were necessarily moved by personal considerations. In a certain sense they were selfish. What they felt called upon to do required courage, but it was nothing reckless. They were shrewd. They acted upon the outcome of calm consideration, choosing what they believed to be the lesser of two evils; and it is sad to think that had not success attended our favorites, few of them all would be remembered from year to year.

Much as we know, we have yet far more to learn, and this condition of ignorance, which dates from the appearance of man upon the earth, will remain until the last human being in the world stands wondering what is before him. This prosy fact binds us very closely to the present. We have, or ought to have, enough to do with the demands that each day makes upon us; and what leisure is permitted us is most wisely spent in the study of what our contemporaries are doing. If they are outreaching us in any endeavor, we need greater energy and have less time to dream; if they are outspeeding us, what do our own limbs need to give them equal agility? We need the gold being dug to-day more than the speculations of archæologists concerning prehistoric miners. The pearls that are concealed in the river mussels to-day are worth more than mere knowledge of the caves of Golconda.

The past can claim, with reason, grateful remembrance on our part, but to continually dream over it, and worry even that we cannot unmake some of it, is worse than folly. It can afford us little aid, the world's conditions change so rapidly and radically, and he who, whether by acts or by suggestion, by example or the writing of a book, leads us to be up and doing, not prone and dreaming, does the world a service. Such a one becomes the successful general of a battle of farther-reaching consequence than he wots of. Whether heroes or the humblest of all humble folk, it is well to be up and doing,—caring less for the past and concerned more with the present. Make history, not idly worship that which has been made by others. Be not mere hero-worshippers, but content to know that, while we cannot all be heroes, no life is so lowly placed that it may not be heroic.

DREAMING BOB

I.

> **"One misty, moisty morning,**
> **When cloudy was the weather,**
> **I met an old man**
> **All clad in leather."**
> ***Mother Goose.***

THERE is often so little of real interest connected with the present that it is a genuine pleasure to meet with a person who can carry us back to times that had or seem to have had charms that now are lacking. We have lost all the links that bound us to the past century, and the first decade of the present one does not to so great a degree suggest "ye good old times." Nevertheless, it was before coal was used as fuel, or steam as a motive power, and electricity was little more than a name. So ran my thoughts as I approached the old man who was walking to and fro over a wet and weedy pasture and occasionally thrusting a long staff vigorously into the mud.

He was so promising a specimen for interviewing that I immediately led off with a question which I hoped would lead to a prolonged conversation.

"What are you looking for? a pot of gold?" I asked.

"Tortles."

"What kind of turtles? land or water?" I asked, not feeling disposed to be snubbed, although that seemed to be the old man's purpose.

"Mud," he growled, even more impatiently than before.

"Are mud turtles good to eat?" I asked.

"No, nor to look at," he replied.

"Then what do you want with them?" I asked, without showing a trace of annoyance.

The old man now looked up, and, after staring at me for at least a minute, said, "Young man, do you own this ma'sh?"

"I do," I replied, with a smile.

"Do you want me to go off?" he asked.

"Certainly not," I replied.

"Then will you please let me alone?" he asked, still staring intently at me.

"Oh, yes, if you wish it; but I saw you were a stranger and an old man, and I like to talk to old people," I replied.

"Why?" he asked, in reply to my last words, with a slight change of tone indicative of a trace of amiability.

"Because they usually tell me of days long gone by, and of customs now almost forgotten," I told him, adding, "Old people, whether they do or not, seem to know more than men of my own age, and do know more of old times, of course."

"Umph!" grunted the old man, and then repeated the half-smothered ejaculation several times, looking, as he did so, towards the three huge beeches that towered above the other trees on the wooded hill-side near by. "I'm not as old as them beeches," he finally remarked.

"No, I should say not," I replied.

"Then why don't you go talk to them? I heard a man say once 'there's tongues in trees.'"

I was a good deal taken aback. The old man was getting the best of me, but my interest in him was growing, and I did not feel like beating a retreat. Still, I could not find anything to say, and I stood before him feeling very much like a child before a stranger. Meanwhile he continued probing for turtles, but eying me at the same time, I fancied. At last I hit upon one more question, and rather timidly asked, "Do you live near by?"

"Dog-town," he muttered.

"As far as that?" I asked, with some surprise.

"Just that far; and, if I must talk, instead of tortlin', why, let's go to the hill-foot and sit down."

"All right." And, with this brief reply, I followed the old man to where a tree-trunk lay upon the ground, and there we sat down.

"Yes, young man," he commenced, "I am a stranger in these parts, and yet I ain't."

"How's that?" I asked.

"I was born back in what's called 'Dog-town' in '20, and moved off when not more'n a baby, but not 'fore I had a notion o' what the place was like. It's been rough-

and-tumble ever since, and now I've drifted back. It's all changed but just round there, and folks ain't yet grudged me my shanty."

"Do you live alone?" I asked.

"Say, please, young man, don't question too close. Do I live alone? 'Alone:' that's a word that means too much for me. I don't like to hear it. Yes, I live by myself," said the old man, in a voice quite different from his brief words when on the meadow.

Before I could find anything to say, he continued, "I drifted back to these parts, and there's just one thing I want to do 'fore I slip up——"

"Slip up?" I repeated after him, in a way that showed I had not caught his meaning.

"Slip up, yes; die, I mean," he said, somewhat impatiently.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, adding, "Go on: I won't interrupt again."

"Daddy hid what he had somewhere in the woods, and never let on to me, 'cause I was too small, and just after mammy died he slipped up, a tree he was a-cuttin' fallin' on him. Bein' alone, some folks took me, and I kind o' lost all notion of what went on when I had a home, till years and years slipped round, and then somehow it all come back to me, sudden-like; but I'd been a fool all the time, spendin' one day what I earnt the day 'fore, and it was hard work to get anywhere near these parts. I got to seein' in dreams just where daddy put what he had, but what I see now round here ain't what it used to be."

"Not around Dog-town?" I asked.

"Yes, it's sort o' the same round there, but the big timber's gone, and I can't place my dreamin' just as I want to. That dream ain't no common one. It's just a-goin' back to when I was that little feller as toddled about after daddy when he was workin' about home."

"Tell me how the place looks in your dream. Perhaps I can help you out?" I asked.

"How can you?" asked the old man, giving a sudden start, and facing me.

"I know the history of these parts pretty well, and have some old deeds and documents that might throw light on the subject," I replied, with much earnestness.

"Old deeds and dockiments: them's the

tools lawyers use to chisel folks out o' what they've got. They're no use," he remarked, with much disappointment in his voice and manner.

"They're not always that bad, either documents or lawyers," I suggested. "But come, what sort of a place was it?"

"You see," he continued, as if not intending to give me a direct reply or one at all, "I never saw the real spot to know it, and daddy never told, and p'r'aps he hadn't nothin', but that was my notion, and the spot was like this that I see in my dream. There was a big chestnut, and a squatty-like black oak, and an ash-tree kind o' bent over, and the ground sort o' high and mossy-like between 'em. I go there every night o' my life in my dream, and just as I find the thing——"

"What thing?" I asked.

"It's chest-like, only black, and brass nails in the lid," he explained.

"Where was your father's house? Just where did it stand?" I asked.

"That's just the trouble. I got nothin' to go by, and only sort o' guess it stood where the big clay-pits now is. I've squatted near as I could get, in an old shanty, and go pokin' round when folks ain't too near to get curious; and, by thunder!" exclaimed the old man, with great energy, "I'm a fool to give it all away, just because you pestered me out on the ma'sh."

"I can keep a secret, sir," I remarked, with some show of dignity.

"'Course you can, but can and will ain't twin brothers by a jugful, young man. You can keep it, but are you goin' to?" he asked, with a show of incredulity.

"Yes," I said, "I'm going to."

"Well, I can't call 'em back, and if I've throwed the fat in the fire it's my own fault," he remarked, rather sorrowfully.

"But you haven't," I assured him, adding, "I said I would keep your secret. Did the people digging clay ever find a chest, or haven't you asked?"

"If they did, they never let on, for I sort o' questioned round when I was lookin' at 'em dig," he replied.

"Can you find any trace of the trees you see in your dreams?" I asked.

"Only one big chestnut stump, but the ground ain't right round it," he replied.

"Did you dig round there?" I asked.

"Only a little; and I say the ground ain't right. It's no use, and I guess the dream's devil's work just to fool me. Seems a pity he can't let me alone on airth, seein' he's got a mortgage on me due when I slip up."

"Don't get discouraged yet a bit," I replied: "go on looking for turtles, and to-morrow I'll come see you."

"What for?" he asked, with a strange look, as if he was both glad and sorry.

"Because I'd like the fun of looking for the chest you dream about, and I'll look over some documents in the mean time and see when the big woods were cut off, and so on. I'll come about noon, and we'll talk it over again." I said this in a way to show that I meant it, and hoped he would cheer up a little, for I was now thoroughly interested, even if the old man was slightly demented, which I did not think.

"And I'll go back to my shanty and dream it all over again, and that's what it'll all amount to," he said, shaking his head.

Leaving the old man to resume his turtle-hunting, I went home, with no other thoughts than of what I had been told, and all that evening I recalled the old man's words, while looking over the early deeds that had passed from hand to hand, covering the swamp-land about Dog-town.

II.

It is not strange that I dreamed that night of the old man,—dreamed I was the old man himself and hunting in the woods for "daddy's chest." I pushed through the painted meadow, breast-high in weeds,—boneset, iron-weed, and dodder,—all in bloom, and every ditch I leaped over was marked by plumes of lizard's tail or clustered rose-mallow. Never was meadow so beautiful; but I could not linger there. Ever ahead the crested tit was calling, "Here, here," and I was forced to follow. Then the brush-land, now a sombre forest, was reached, and on through the pathless woods I sped, walking by no natural means, but hurried as if shod in seven-league boots, and stopping suddenly where there grew a great chestnut, an oak, and a bended ash-tree. I looked about for the old man, but he was not there. Instead, a brilliant cardinal flashed across the open, chased by a hundred sparrows. Then a black hawk darted by, followed by scolding crows, and disappeared. It was like an engine and coal-cars rushing into a tunnel; and all the while the crested tit that had charmed me called from overhead, "Here, here." After all, the old man was not demented, and I had found his "daddy's chest." Then I awoke.

At the promised time I appeared at the door of the old man's shanty, and found him waiting. What a place for a man to live! Except that he had a fire, there was almost nothing in the hut that we call the necessaries of life; but the old man gave me no opportunity to scan his surroundings closely. He came out of the door-way, where he had been standing as I approached, and motioned to a bench under the single tree that shaded the spot.

"I've had a different dream, and want to tell all about it, for now I know it's no use to start a-huntin'. I was first in a ma'sh that looked like a flower-garden, and then in a big woods, and a little bird kept hollerin', 'Here,' and I follered till I dropt on a bit of mossy ground. There was the same trees, but a lot of birds kept goin' by, and they seemed to holler, 'Fool,' and I woke up all cold and shiverin'. It's no use. You seem sort o' sent to bring me to my senses or knock me clean out o' 'em, and it ain't much matter which, seein' I'm about used up."

"I don't agree with you, old man; but first let me ask you your name," I said, in reply to his pathetic speech.

"My real name? No; but where I lived longest it was 'Dreamin' Bob,' 'cause I used to say I was goin' to be rich when my dream come true." And for the first time the old man smiled as he spoke.

"Well, I'll call you Robert, then," I replied. "And let me tell you, I had almost the same dream, last night, that you did."

"You did?" And the old man looked very sceptical as he spoke.

"I did, and I think when I was a little boy I saw those trees in the woods. If you're in the notion now, we'll start on a hunt, for I'm a believer now in 'daddy's chest.'" And I looked very serious as I spoke, to give him greater confidence in what I said.

"Whether you're tryin' to make game of me or not, I'll go 'long," the old man said;

"but I don't go thinkin' you can help me out. What about you're old dockiments you were talkin' of? Did they help you out any?"

"You made fun of 'em, and of deeds and lawyers and so on, but I know who you are," I replied.

"Who?" he asked, stopping suddenly and facing me.

"Bartholomew Quiggle, son of old Aunt Betsy that kept cakes and beer in her day, when this was a stage road," I said, with a steady look into the old man's face.

"Bartholomew Quiggle. It's the first time in many a long year since I heard it, 'cept when I said it to myself. Barthol—— but I'm too old to think about it now. Let's find the chest, and then it'll be time to talk it over." The old man moved forward.

For the first time since I met him on the meadows did it occur to me I might be making a fool of myself. I was interested from the start, and had made an effort to identify the old man, which had proved an easy task, but that I should be influenced by a dream was absurd. Had not what he had told me been enough to bring about such a dream? Even "Dreamin' Bob" was losing faith in dreams after many years, and now I took it up with his former enthusiasm. It was absurd, and here I was, his guide, of my own volition, and not knowing in what direction to go. I hesitated, and he noticed it.

"What's the matter?" he asked: "gettin' out o' the notion a'ready, when you was so full of it?"

"Let's look over the ground you've been examining," I suggested, not knowing what to say.

"It couldn't 'a' been far from the house, and it stood close on the road, you know," he replied, and this was a clue, if we could only locate the house. No document of mine helped me here; I could only guess; and so we moved on, taking what I thought was a probable course. We were soon in a tract of sprout-land, and the stumps of the original timber growth had quite disappeared. Here and there, though, was a variation in the level surface of the ground,—a slight elevation, and moss-covered or bright green with a mat of fine grass that showed the ground was there particularly fertile. All such places we examined with some care, but to have dug into any one would have been absurd. Every such spot was counted out because of its position with reference to the public road. At last we came to where pine woods had been, a little island of pines once in a sea of white oaks.

"Stop," cried the old man, who was a little distance off; "there's been pines here, and somehow—— But my head's all muddled." And he stood by a stout sapling and leaned heavily against it.

"You've been walking too fast," I suggested.

"No, I ain't; but that dream's botherin' me, and I feel sort o' queer," he said, with a trembling voice that frightened me. "I'm tough enough, seein' what I've gone through in my day. Don't you worry: it's the dream. I sort o' feel as if it was comin' true."

"We will rest awhile, anyhow," I said, "and have a bite of lunch." And I pulled a small package from my pocket. The old man evidently expected me to produce a whiskey-flask, but I did not, and with a slight show of disappointment he accepted the solid food I offered.

While we were eating, we heard voices near by, and I made a motion to keep quiet, to which he silently assented. Two men passed near us, but without discovering our whereabouts. When within hearing one was talking earnestly, narrating a recent adventure. "My dog treed something," he said, "and I couldn't call him off, so I left my work and went over. The cur was diggin' a hole where there'd been a big tree standin' once, and I went up to see what he'd got. He'd struck a root, I thought, but, lookin' down, I saw a piece of board and an iron on it; and, lookin' closer, it showed it was a box that had been buried."

"No!" exclaimed his companion, stopping in the path and looking at his friend.

"You bet; and I tackled the job quick, seein' some one might come and git it out. It was all rusty and rotten and filled with a mess o' stuff I couldn't make out, and a big double handful of money."

"Gold?" said the other man, interrupting the narrator.

"Gold! Well, I guess not. It was nothin' but pennies and a few things they told me used to be called fips and shillin's. It didn't amount to five dollars all told, except what I got extra on some of the old pennies."

While these men were talking, the old man did not move a muscle, but his face was the picture of despair. I wished myself a hundred miles away. The finder of the treasure and his friend moved on, and when we could no longer hear their footsteps I turned to the old man and said, "Well, what shall we do?"

"I'm goin' back to my shanty, and you needn't come. I'm much obliged to you all the same." He turned and left me without saying even "good-by."

I did not follow him, much as I wished to do so, and I tried in vain to turn my thoughts into other channels than those concerning him.

That night Dreaming Bob, otherwise Bartholomew Quiggle, died.

WINKLE: THE EEL-MAN

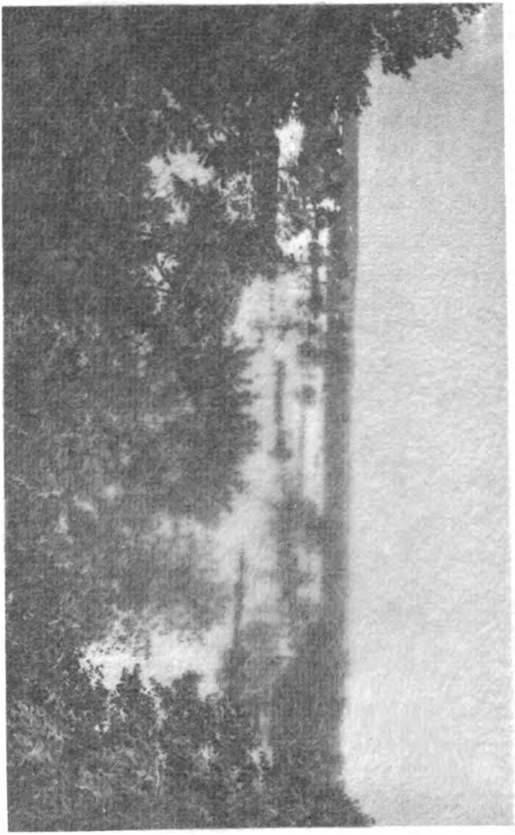
I.

DOES the place make the people? Certainly the mountaineer differs from the dweller on a plain, and those who have spent their days 'long shore are distinguishable from either. Who has failed to notice that the country boy who leaves home for the town becomes "citified" and in all ways unlike his home-staying brother? Certainly the place has much to do with it,—as much as the mould decides the shape of the mass of clay the potter places within it. Heredity, too, acts an important part. There was a Job Perriwinkle, servant, among the arrivals in West Jersey two centuries ago, and the Perriwinkles remained such for succeeding generations: the last of them just a little above that condition. These things considered, it is not strange that "Winkle," as every one knew him, should have been a product of Poverty Cross.

A word here as to this strange place. It is where two old long-abandoned bridle-paths intersected, near the middle of an irredeemable tract,—one where Nature had tossed aside all the rubbish, after fashioning a goodly land. Originally it was known as Poverty Cross-roads, as one old deed attests; but recently the interest in folk-lore and local history has brought to the front the champion of this strange explanation: that the name is derived from the fact that a missionary set up a station here, and, failing to make one convert, called the place Poverty Cross. This is how much local history is "made." But what better can be expected? This place, and much of its surroundings for many a mile, offers no foothold for ambition. Those who remain are content with little, even intellectually, and were charmed recently by a pickwickian lecture on the "Oneness of Unity and Differences of the Diametrically Opposite," even speaking of it, months after, as a "learned discourse."

But let us back to Winkle, the nearest to a savage of them all, and so worthiest of consideration. I will not attempt to describe him. The truth would not be accepted, and I will not spoil a good story by using false colors. I can only hope that his strange physique will shine through what I shall tell about him.

I have said that the last of the Perriwinkles had a glimmer of higher aims than servitude, and while yet a lad had acquired such freedom as he wished, becoming a self-sustaining trapper, fowler, and fisherman. It was as the last that he pre-eminently excelled. He alone, of all the men who lived and loafed near the creek, knew Crosswicks Creek thoroughly. It seemed as if he must have felt with his hands or feet, or both, the whole bed of the stream, from the river, where it ended, up to the first mill-dam, a distance of about eight miles. On one occasion, when with Winkle, I remember he stopped his boat suddenly, and, thrusting an oar to the bottom, showed me how deep was the water at this point,—it was low tide at the time,—and remarked, "Cur'us, but, lad, there's a walnut-stump down there that's three feet across. Once a time the creek ran over yander," and he pointed to a long row



The Overflowing Delaware

of sassafras-trees that divided a long level reach of dry pasture meadow from a wider area that was lower and marshy. "If you stand," he continued, "at the end of the trees, you'll see a dip in the land, and that's the old creek-bed. It was in Injun times, o' course."

"How came you ever to notice this," I asked, "and find out about the walnut-stump?"

"Umph! Well, lad, I'm not a fisherman fur nothin'. There's nets been broke in that stump, and many a hook is stickin' in it now. Why, boy, it don't take long to dive down and see what's what; and can't you see how land lays when you walk over it?" he replied, with an over-abundance of contempt in both tone and manner.

"Not always," I replied.

"Can't? Then your eyes ain't o' much account. If a thing's right afore you and you can't see it, then what's the good o' having' eyes?" Cutting his speech short, he gave me a searching glance that explained a great deal of what was passing in his mind. He had taken me up as an apt pupil and now was disposed to set me down as a dullard.

This had been an earlier experience, and a later one, too, of mine. I was more sorry than surprised. It were foolish to attempt to attain to Winkle's excellencies in their peculiar lines.

This strange man did not have ordinary human eyes. The four senses of touch, hearing, smell, and sight had been so developed by constant use that he had brought them to the perfection that characterizes such wild animals as are forced to depend on them for their food and safety. The physiologist may laugh at this, and say it is impossible, but I long ago learned to laugh at the doctors. All that I have written was true of Winkle. He was too extraordinary a character to be described. The charge of exaggeration would surely follow; and yet it is unwise to stand in awe of critics. Not one of them ever saw the man. I knew him well, and he has been heard to say I was the only friend he ever had. I have said that he could not be described, but let me try. He was tall and slim, and his head was like his body, so that it pointed him off something like a clumsily-sharpened lead-pencil. His arms were snake-like, and, as a neighbor once said, "his legs are nothin' but a string o' knees." He could bend in half a dozen directions at once, and when walking along the highway he swayed to and fro as if more than half intoxicated; but in a narrow, twisting forest-path he glided swiftly, silently, and ghost-like, making no overhanging branch bend by the pressure of his hands or body. He wormed his way between obstacles that check the progress of ordinary mortals, and it was a hopeless task for any one to attempt to follow him with the same speed and grace. He climbed a tree as a blacksnake darts over a brush-heap or glides along the top rail of an old worm-fence. Stretching along a slender branch, Winkle could reach to outlying points towards which no nest-robbing boy would dare to venture. Perhaps in all this he has had his equals. It was in the water that Winkle was at home. Then he always reminded me of a seal. His movements were very similar, for his arms were not prominent when he swam. The propelling force was derived wholly by leg-motion. The ignorant folk who knew him said that water did not wet him, which was not quite true, but never had a hair ever grown on Winkle's body, and his skin was oily to the touch, or, on land, like newly-made and flexible parchment. To be in the water, he always claimed, limbered him up, while too long tarrying on land caused him to wrinkle and crack like a dead leaf. This, his own way of putting it, tells truthfully the whole story. His clothing was of the simplest kind, and eight months of each year he was barefoot.

It was an English gardener and poacher, who came to these parts when Winkle was in his prime, who gave him, with my aid, the name of the "eel-man." One morning I met Jimmie on the public road, and he assured me that "this veek 'as been a veek of ewents. Th' old woman has brown critters in her throat, and I've seen a man as swims like a heel."

II.

"Winkle," I said one morning, as I stood by the door of his quaint cabin,—"Winkle, did you ever hear of the wreck of the Betsy Ann?"

"Wrack o' who?" he asked, with abundant surprise in his tones. "Wrack o' who?

I've heard o' more'n one woman bein' wracked by takin' up too quick with the fust to come along, but who's Betsy Ann?"

"Come, old man," I said in an earnest way, to command his attention; "I mean just what I say. Didn't your folks ever tell you about the sloop, Betsy Ann, that got wrecked off the mouth of Barge Creek?"

"No; nor yours neither, I guess. Why, lad, there ain't room enough at the mouth o' Barge for anythin' bigger'n a skiff to get swamped. You've got things mixed, lad," Winkle replied, with earnestness quite equal to my own. In fact, my question was an intimation that I had superior knowledge of the creek's history, if not of the stream itself, and this he was quite unwilling to allow. After a lengthy pause, which I did not interrupt, he continued, "You'll be laughed at some time if you ain't kerful about keepin' stories straight. This creek here ain't the 'Lantic Ocean, and shipwracks sound better when you talk about the sea-shore. Guess your Betsy Ann was only a hay-scow and medder-grass the cargo," and Winkle chuckled to himself at the thought of having squelched me.

I was not unprepared for this, and let him have his fill of enjoyment at my expense before I spoke again; then I remarked, in a quiet way that showed how sure I felt of what I was saying, "It was a long time ago; long before you were born; more than one hundred years ago. A great wind came up suddenly, just as the boat got inside the creek, and sent her over on her side and wedged her between trees growing on the bank, and stove a hole in her stern, so that she had her cargo spoiled. They didn't get a great deal out of her, and when she was hauled off she sank. One account says she was burning when she sank. Anyhow, the hulk lay there in the channel and rotted away, I suppose. Let's go see if we can find any signs of her this late day."

My long speech ended, Winkle looked me very searchingly in the eyes in a way that makes it impossible to hold anything back, if you happen to be telling him only half a truth. Then he stared at the clouds and towards the creek and at times hummed to himself, but not a word for me. I waited, knowing he was thinking of all he knew of that part of the creek. Suddenly his whole manner changed. His eyes sparkled like coals of fire, and he said, with unusual interest, even enthusiasm, "Yes, I'll go; but how did you hear all this?"

"It is down in an old commonplace book I have. The Betsy Ann belonged to my great grandfather," I replied, with some evidence of pride in my manner of speaking, for I knew he could not doubt my authority for all that I had told him.

"Umph!" grunted Winkle; but just how to construe that frequent ejaculation of the man I never learned.

I was ready, then and there, to go, and Winkle was never unprepared. He had always boasted of being free as a bird and had made his boast good, which showed his superiority over some men I have met. We were soon aboard this strange man's trim little boat, and its owner's semi-aquatic nature seemed to animate the vessel. It more than merely floated. It swam like a wary diver, just skimming the surface; yet we were a heavy load for so light a craft, but Winkle's wrist was as true a machine as ever was turned out by an engine-builder. His sculling was marvellous. Familiar points, like the Swan Island flood-gates and Hickory Meadow and the tall poplars were passed in quick succession, and then we went through the crooked water-way of the wild Willow bend, where Nature has never been disturbed,—swiftly, it seemed, as might a frightened fish. It was a splendid ride, but too short. All too soon for me, we were at rest where the stream forms a wide bay and the waters of Barge Creek come pouring into it with every outgoing tide.

Before I could realize what Winkle was about he had disappeared. He had left the boat so quietly it was not moved from an even keel, nor was there any commotion in the water. Fancy a water-snake gliding over the gunwales and you have the fashion of Winkle's movements accurately described.

For me, of course, there was nothing to do but sit quietly in the boat and await his return and report of what he had found. Winkle was now groping in the water and mud as might an eel in search of food. How he could determine anything was a mystery. Might he not be something of a humbug, after all? I sometimes asked myself this;

but, then, he had never been proved such. Suddenly my thoughts were cut short by the recollection of his prolonged absence. I felt worried for a moment and then frightened. Had he stuck in the mud and drowned? I looked over the side of the boat but could see no distance into the water, and I scanned every inch of the near-by shores. I have good eyes. If he were playing some game, I knew that he could not hide from me. Had he disturbed the dock or wild-rice growing at the water's edge, I should have detected it. It is a small object that can elude my search. Certainly, I concluded, an accident has happened. I was really frightened, and, as fright always makes fools of us, made a desperate effort to collect myself. In time, the absurdity of calling to Winkle occurred to me; and as useless would it have been to call for help, for I was far from any habitation. Worse than all, I did not dare to dive, being no swimmer, and Winkle must be dead anyhow, so long a time had elapsed since his disappearance. I waited fully ten minutes to wholly collect myself, and I saw, then, that all that was left to me was to report his death and institute a search for his body.

What a ride was that back to Winkle's cabin! I felt hurried and yet could make no headway. There was but one oar in the boat, and I could not scull except in an awkward way. To paddle was infinitely slow, and the water often too deep to use the oar as a pole. The tide, too, was against me. How sombre the world looked! The sun was red; the leaves dingy; the waters black. I had brought Winkle to his death, and to announce the tidings thereof was an unpleasant anticipation. I must, nevertheless, sound an alarm, and, be the outcome what it might, would be a prominent figure in a most gruesome affair. The creek seemed to lengthen as I worked my way up-stream. Every snag at Willow Bend held me fast, and the tall poplars cast such black shadows across the channel that they seemed effectual barriers to my progress. I paddled, poled, and lamely sculled until at last his cabin was in sight, and then my strength failed me. The spot no longer had any attraction for me, and yet I could look only in the one direction; stared so intently and so long that at last I saw Winkle's ghost sitting in the door-way. I knew now that I had undergone too great excitement and was likely to be ill. Nothing was natural. A strange idea now took possession of me. Had I too been drowned, and was it but the ghost of myself that was now coming back to the cabin; phantom to meet phantom and there fight? I felt, at least, in a defiant mood, and struggled with the oar, for the waters were now tenacious as pitch, and, in spite of all my efforts, the boat stood still. For the moment I did not realize that I was in a thick mat of weeds. This was my first step towards a sane view of the situation, and then I strained my eyes to better see the ghost, praying the while that it might prove some trick of light and shade. With the strength born of desperation I made a final effort and brought the boat to the landing. It came in violent contact with the stake to which it was tied when not in use, and the noise of the collision caused Winkle's ghost to move. I stood and stared, and Winkle, in the flesh, looked up, and I met again that searching gaze of his I knew so well. How I left the boat and reached the cabin, but a few steps away, I do not know. I was too excited still to realize anything altogether rationally, and but dimly remember my question, "What does this all mean?"

Winkle turned slowly towards me as I spoke, and while his reply was forthcoming I slowly regained composure. "It means that you're right," he finally said in a peculiar way that showed he too was much excited, though otherwise undemonstrative.

"Then why didn't you tell me, and how did you get here?" I asked, with some show of indignation.

"How?" he exclaimed, as if surprised at my questions; "why, swum, o' course. Didn't I show a-top o' the water?"

"No; you sneaked off so as to frighten me out of my wits," I replied, with no abatement of my annoyance at the trick he had played me.

"Did, lad? Well, I didn't mean to," Winkle said in most aggravating tones, as if all that had happened was of no consequence nor in any way unusual. "I s'posed I was a-top o' the water somewhere up-stream and didn't think to call back fur you to come on.

It's quicker swimmin' than scullin' a boat with you in it."

Was this fellow human? I felt a little queer in his presence for the first time in my life. English Jimmie was right: Winkle could swim "like a heel," and he had. I was angry, now that I was myself again, and yet too much interested to spoil all by losing my temper. I affected to laugh at the whole matter and allow Winkle to tell his story in his own time and way. This, after some minutes had elapsed, he did.

"I slipped down to the bottom and crawled along the sides where the pebbles jine the muddy slopes, but I couldn't see nothin' that oughtn't 'a' been there. Just mud on the slopes and stones where the tide keeps a-washin'. Then I popped up for a bit o' wind, and went down along the Barge Creek shores, and there wasn't no difference. I kep' comin' up for a puff o' air and down again, and then I made out a hump in the creek channel and a deep hole where the water swashed round like a mill-race. I had to show up often 'fore I could get at the place, and then I found it was all a hump o' hard clay; but I made out a bit o' iron stickin' out. It broke off short-like when I took hold. I kep' bobbin' up and down, so I don't see how you come to miss me; and when I was gettin' pretty well played out I jerked at a bit more o' the old iron, and it sort o' broke away in a big lump, and I grabbed at somethin' shinin' that looked like a shiny fish, but wasn't swimmin'-like. The water was clear enough to make out a little, and I seen what I had was money."

Winkle stopped abruptly at this point and commenced wildly staring at the sky. Then he glanced at me, as if endeavoring to solve some weighty problem that concerned me more than himself. I did not interrupt him. He must have his own way; and it was but a minute or two before his sanity returned and he continued, "Somehow I was sort o' broke up when I found money there and didn't take in where I was, and, grabbin' that piece like a vise, I just made fur the cabin and forgot you had gone along; and that's the hull story," and Winkle gave me one of his searching glances, and said, in a lower and persuasive tone, as if in much doubt as to my decision, "There's this, lad, I'd like to say. You don't need the money much as I do, and if there's more in that mud-bank, why, let me have it fur the gettin'," and saying this he handed me a still rather bright Mexican half-dollar.

Two thoughts came to my mind at the same moment. The coin did not appear as if it had been lying in the mud for more than a century; and, again, why should money have been left on the Betsy Ann? Perhaps Winkle was playing a joke on me, and soon I would be the laughing-stock of the country-side. But, then, I recalled that these were only suspicions, and probably unjust. I could verify nothing of all I thought; but, putting little faith in what people say, as we meet them from day to day, I naturally included this fish-like human, Winkle, though there was some reason for thinking him more honest than his neighbors. He might be all that, and yet not altogether true. But as I continued to handle the half-dollar better thoughts came to me, and I promised all he wished. Any dollars left in the wreck of the Betsy Ann he was quite welcome to. They were as much his as mine anyhow, and I certainly would not dive for any of them myself, nor tell any one what was now a secret between us.

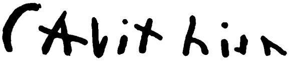
Winkle's countenance brightened at my words. He seemed like an excited child over a new toy, and commenced, I fancied, to build castles in the air. I tried to draw from him further details as to the day, but he would not say more, and at last, rather reluctantly, I left him sitting in his cabin door-way.

III.

Winkle soon became, in more ways than one, a changed man. He was less about the creek and more frequently seen at the tavern. It was evident that he had found more than the single half-dollar he had shown me, or did he make constant visits to the wreck and gather a coin or two each time? There was evidently something back of the little that I knew, and I could learn nothing, of late, from questioning him. "Yes, he had been to the wrack since that day," but beyond this he would not go. To solve the mystery, if possible, I went to the wreck one morning, and, approaching it very quietly, I noticed a slight but constant agitation of the rank reed growth just inshore from where the wreck was lying. It may only be a stray cow, or dog digging for musk-rats, I thought, but I strongly suspected it was Winkle. But why was he inshore and not under the water? I determined that my little woodcraft should stand me well in hand. I would surprise Winkle, although I knew I was pitted against a man that could not readily be deceived. Now was my chance to show him, if it was Winkle, that I had been an apt scholar. Very slowly drawing back, I noiselessly hid my boat in thick-set button-bushes on the creek-bank, and, creeping to a clump of trees, climbed up into one until I could get a bird's-eye view of the surroundings. It never occurred to me he could look up at a tree as easily as I could look down from it. As I supposed, I plainly recognized the man who was steadily digging in the stiff soil that is now just a little above high tide. I saw at a glance the whole truth. One end of the vessel reached out into the present creek channel and the rest of it was buried in the steep, stiff mud-bank of the stream. Satisfied of this, I clambered down from my perch and began creeping cautiously towards Winkle, but it was evident at a glance that, however near I might get to him, there would still be intercepting weeds, and, while I might lie concealed, I could see nothing of what the man was doing. While revolving all this in my mind, as I was creeping on all-fours through bulrushes and tear-thumb grass, I was startled by Winkle loudly calling out, "Say, lad, what's the good o' holdin' back? I saw you up the tree and heard your boat long 'fore I saw it."

Had this man eyes in the back of his head? I never thought before to look; and what ears! Yet as I noticed now, they presented no unusual appearance. Pride in my woodcraft was, of course, all gone. I stepped boldly up, but, as I knew, with a flushed face. Winkle laughed, after his fashion, and showed me all that he had been doing. The Betsy Ann had been partly burned before she sank, and the wreck was, as I had supposed, lying with the stern inshore. The little that remained of the cabin was now exposed, and in it Winkle had evidently found some treasure, but how much he would not say. This was to be his last visit, he said, as there was nothing more to uncover. All that had been lost, years ago, that could be found he felt sure he had got. "A little fur me old age," he put it. I did not stay long. The heat and mosquitoes robbed the place of all romance, and, as Winkle was about through with his work when I got there, we left the wreck of the Betsy Ann together. "It's all owin' to you," was Winkle's one remark, as we turned our backs upon the spot. I could not keep very near him, row as I might. His little boat fairly flew over the water, and in the tangled water-way of Willow Bend I lost sight of him altogether. I looked about for several minutes, but saw nothing of the man or boat. He could not have returned to the wreck without passing me, unless both man and boat went under the surface of the water. I had no inclination to return, and I knew that, if Winkle wished to elude me, to search for him was useless; so I slowly rowed my boat to his landing, and, tying my boat, took possession of the cabin. It was too ancient and fish-like for a summer day, and I walked to the spring near by, and there, curled up on the moss, awaiting his return, and reading the meanwhile. As usual, I fell asleep, and was roused an hour later by Winkle giving me a hearty shake. In an instant I was on my feet; but what a change had come over Winkle! His old, odd ways were gone; the charm of his unique manner and even appearance was a thing of the past. He was now merely a bundle of irritated nerves that excessive stimulation was steadily breaking down. I foresaw his end was near, but did not venture to ask any questions or offer any advice. I knew that to preach temperance would only provoke wrath. I was genuinely sorry for him, but helpless so far as checking his downfall was concerned. I could only stand aside and let him go his own pace.

And the end came. Two days later, I was summoned, before daylight, to his cabin. He had been found, by chance, by a passing fisherman. As the first rays of the rising sun glinted through the trees I entered the shanty, and there found Winkle, dead, lying on his face. His arms were outstretched, and in one hand he held a canvas shot-bag partly filled with coin, and in the other was a rusty nail. What the latter meant was puzzling at first, but, when the light was stronger, I saw that the man, now dead, had scratched upon the floor, in unmistakable manner, these letters:



I have had somewhat to do with hieroglyphics and traced the significance of Indian messages scratched upon slabs of stone, but here was something new. My free translation ran: *C. Abbott: his own;* or, in still plainer language, Winkle meant me to have what money he had left. I sought no one's advice, but acted as probate judge, executor, and legatee. No harm was done. After Winkle was buried there was nothing left.

WINDFALLS

"Too long, too long we kept the level plain,
The tilled, tamed fields, the bending orchard bough!
The byre, the barn, the threshing-floor, the plough
Too long have been our theme and our refrain!
Enough, my brothers, of this Doric strain."

NOT a bit of it! As yet there has been but the twanging of the fiddle-strings, and the performance has not yet commenced.

"You forget Thoreau," perhaps the quoted authoress remarks.

I forget nothing. Simplicity has not yet had a worthy song in her honor. These humble themes are not beneath the notice of sound common sense. Laurel gathered from the mountain's brow is no greener than that growing lower down the rocky slopes. Grant the grandeur of the mighty sea, but who has gathered all the treasures of a mill-pond. The little clump of trees near my chamber window is forest enough for a lifetime. Every one of the two hundred trees has fifty branches, and here are hidden ten thousand marvels that are yet to be made plain. The modest plateau that rises but seventy feet above the river is sufficient of a "cliff upreared in liquid air" when its modest tree-growth attracts the birds and shelters many a beast that startles the unthinking traveller who passes in the night. Here, too, in such commonplace surroundings have been generations of jolly good men and women, brave as lions and gentle as lambs,—a great deal better every healthy way than most of the world's heroes and fame-crowned beauties. Perhaps it is the frost in the air of this bright October morning that has benumbed my wit. I am not sure at what the authoress I have quoted is driving, so I will take myself to the orchard, seeking the fruit of "the bending orchard bough," as I had planned, and indulge in simple pleasures. Give me plain substantiality in all things. A hickory staff is better reliance than many a gold-headed cane. The bow of the archer was ruined by too elaborate carving. My rough, stout walking-stick helps me in many ways, for it is long and light, and I like to probe the tangles before I tread on them, and many a four-footed creature has bounded away at my prodding that I might not otherwise have seen. A basket is an abomination, a bag or bundle the climax of horrors, but a well-chosen stick is a worthy companion that clogs neither my steps nor thinking.

The best orchard, to my taste, within easy reach is the oldest; now so very old its history is forgotten. Every trunk is hollow, every branch lichen coated. Dilapidated as is every one of the ninety-odd trees, the days of their fruition is not yet over. Sap crowds up their wrinkled trunks and stirs the crooked branches to flowering every April, just as it did in the heyday of their youthful vigor almost a century ago; and much of the fruit kindly matures though the farmer does not attempt to stay the ravages of insects beyond protecting the birds that come and go and live the summer long happy lives wandering up and down the orchard's long, leafy aisles. There is still, as there will be while a tree is standing, the annual gathering of the autumn fruit, the carting to the cider-press, and then the desertion of the place by all men but myself, to whom its generous owner has made over the right to the windfalls, first satisfying himself that there are none; and verily, few are the apples that escape his searching eyes. I count it excellent good luck if there are one or two, at most, to each tree. Indeed, did he think I ever found as many as a hundred apples his agreement would be recalled until at least nine-tenths of them were gathered. "I never saw nothin' so small; it was only worth 'thank'ee'" is this man's motto. What an eye the needle must have that he can crawl through! He is so stingy that I have since early childhood tried my best to get ahead of him, and usually I do. Just how is quite another matter.

Just now I am not concerned with my neighbor, but his belongings. His orchard to-day is of more profit to me than to him, and in the long run I gather goodlier fruit from it than has ever been carted to his bins. His cider-press yields me many an enjoyable hour every autumn that he would like to exchange for his anxious moments when vinegar is down in price and he deeper down in spirits. I have a profound regard for the old cider-mill. It is a quaint structure, with a primitive atmosphere about it that dissolves the present and transmutes the crude facts of the moment to delightful day-dreams. There is music, too, in the hum of bees and angry buzzing of wasps that so love to sip the lingering sweets of drying heaps of pomace. When there is nobody about,—press, orchard, and old vinegar-sheds all deserted,—then I find them crowded. Here, if anywhere, you can call back the quaint characters that were one time the busy men of the neighborhood.

October now; it is natural to stop at the cider-press when passing by and test, with a rye straw, the most recently filled barrels. Luckily for me, the owner cannot charge for an unmeasurable quantity, and my assurance that the quality was good was his only recompense. The cider, as such, was not ready for market, and its owner had not yet turned his attention to the pump.

A little later the flicker's rattling cry and the shrill chirp of a suspicious robin greeted me as I crept through the rails of the old fence and stood in the shade of the nearest tree, a wine-sap that had borne most excellent fruit in its day. I did not scan the half-leafless branches, but looked into the hollow of the trunk, where, a year ago, I had placed a convenient hickory club, that had brought down for me many a stray apple. Drawing out the club I disturbed a pretty white-footed mouse. What strange impulses we have! I threw the club after the retreating mouse and barely missed it. How persistently the savage lingers in us! I have found that a very large proportion of our wild-life is associated with hollow trees, and particularly with hollow apple-trees. This is quite readily accounted for. The orchard is, for much of the time, a well-stored magazine, with no locks guarding the supplies. The fruit attracts the insects; these attract birds; these, in turn, draw the carnivorous mammals. Again, an orchard is not as frequently entered as the fields or even pastures. The rows of trees become a new forest, and afford, when they are grown as old as these, safe and snug harbors for nearly every form of terrestrial life. Even such large creatures as the raccoon and opossum are sometimes here at home; the skunk, mink, and weasel find it a convenient if not congenial spot, the skunk being enough of a climber to reach the entrance to a hollow if the trunk of the tree was not perfectly straight up and down; and how seldom this occurs, or, more correctly perhaps, how frequently the other or leaning position is found. I never saw an orchard where all the tree-trunks were perpendicular, and I recall several trees that were but little removed from a horizontal position. Mice naturally abound, the apple-seeds affording abundance of food, and bats will take their diurnal sleep in a hollow trunk as comfortably as in a barn or the attic of the farm-house. Indeed, unless the farmer keeps very alert dogs that are disposed to hunting, the old orchard will prove excellent hunting-ground for the naturalist interested in fur-bearing animals.

The ornithology of an orchard is, as might be expected, that of the neighborhood. There are no birds averse to clustered apple-trees, and very many find it the only attractive feature of the farm. This is true all the year round, and never do snow-birds and tree-sparrows, in winter, seem more at home than among bare apple-boughs. In spring the conditions all favor the congregating here of migratory warblers. No other trees attract so much insect-life, and this alone is the food of these north-bound birds. Misled by text-books and the common names of many species, I have looked in vain for certain warblers among pine-trees, in swamps, and forests of deciduous trees of many species, and finally found them in the orchard; but I have not found that this holds good as to orchards of other fruit. Neither peach- nor pear-trees, be there dozens or hundreds, seem particularly attractive to birds of any species. How this may be in fruit-growing districts elsewhere I have not been able to learn, but my own note-book, referring to a locality carefully studied in Maryland, shows that but two per cent. of all the nests I found were in an orchard of about five thousand trees. In the case of summer birds and of those that remain throughout the year, our resident species, it is found that no other locality suits them equally well. The ornithology of an old apple-tree would make a very interesting book. I will not give the list of birds I have found nesting in and on one such tree. It would not be prudent; but I would like to compare it with the memoranda made by some open-eyed observer.

This day, cool and crisp as frost can make it, there are many small sparrows in the brown grasses between the trees, and many a chickadee, downy woodpecker, creeper, and nuthatch busy overhead. Perhaps a very precise person would say there was the sound of unceasing activity instead of music, but the effect of these birds' voices was not so commonplace as that, but in every way agreeable, and not suggestive of the rattle and clamor of a crowded city street. The highways of the bird-world were filled, but the busy crowd was more like that of contented laborers whistling while they worked. It is cheering to note the happy manner of our winter birds. Not one regrets that it is the dreary time of the year, and certainly the orchard is now an ideal hunting-ground. No storm is so violent but the shelter afforded by the hollow trees proves equal to all demands, and that such shelter is acceptable to birds I have proved by examination during the prevalence of both rain and snow.

The hollows occupied by owls or any animal other than a mouse would be avoided, but there is usually room enough for all. I was glad to see and hear the song-sparrows. In a corner of the orchard there has long been a heap of rubbish. Trifling windfalls from the door-yard pines, woody weeds that persisted in springing up where only modest grass should grow, and the thousand and one odds and ends that should have been burned were gathered here, and everybody has been too busy or too lazy to apply a match. The growing heap has been an eyesore for years, but to-day it was almost pretty. The song-sparrows were in possession, and were as tuneful as in the early April days, when they took time by the forelock and squatted here, knowing that a nest in such a tangle was comparatively safe. To-day the brush-heap is positively pretty: the dead twigs in admirable disorder captivating the eye, because the home of sparrows whose songs ever captivate the ear. For an hour these birds declared their happiness from their chosen home, and while they sang I listened. Then the shadow, but that only, of a sharp-shinned hawk fell upon them, and I took a few forward steps and sought my favorite tree in the orchard,—preferred not for its fruit, but its general patriarchal appearance and glorious show of strength, a seek-no-farther. Suggestive name! I sat here, where I could look far off in every direction, and dreamed of the windfalls of other days and gave no heed to possible fruit hidden from the sharp eyes of the orchard's miserly owner. I confined my thoughts to apples, for that phrase, "the windfalls of other days," is but a hollow mockery to me when given any wider application.

Are our apples as good as those that ripened and made glad the whiskey-warmed hearts of our sedate Quaker grandfathers? I think I would recognize to-day the flavor of a golden pippin in its prime, a belle fleur that was perfect, or the incomparable richness of a winter pearmain or a genuine sheepnose. The gnarly, stunted, distorted, tasteless fruit that I now gather from centenarian trees has only the charm that imagination calls up. There is excellent fruit to be gathered in our young orchards, but has it not lost the full flavor of old-time favorites? We have a variety of opinions on the subject.

Perhaps my own taste has changed, but apples nowadays seem to me insipid, and I would rather munch the sour, stunted yield of this old orchard, and indulge in a day-dream, than eat the choicest of the polished prize fruit exhibited at the county fair.

It has sometimes, but very seldom, happened that the summer's sun warms the projecting cheek of some stray apple until it acquires the richness of old-time prosperous days, and when such rare specimens come to hand there come with them visions of other years when insipid fruit was the exception, not the rule. The last winter pearmain that I tasted was one of these. Grandpa's strange dumpling and his look of astonishment became as vivid as on the day of the occurrence of the incident. Auntie was busy making dumplings for dinner, and when her back was turned I slipped my painted rubber ball—it was decorated with a grinning face in gaudy colors—into a mass of dough, and it was duly put in its net-work bag and placed with other dumplings in the pot, and auntie was none the wiser. It was not to be distinguished from the others when it came upon the table, and how I wondered who would get it! The anxious moments dragged wearily along, and then, as luck would have it, because of the plump appearance of that particular dumpling, auntie placed it before her father. He was busily engaged in a bit of argument at the time, and, without looking at his plate, covered it with syrup and then pressed it with his fork. It did not yield as a dumpling should, and, pressing it still harder, it rolled from under his hand and bounded across the table. "Well!" exclaimed grandpa. I didn't look up. "Goodness!" said auntie, in a startled way; but I had to raise my eyes, and I caught just a glimpse of my rubber ball, from which the dough had peeled, and that grinning face was staring at auntie. Her later exclamations and grandpa's *tut, tut* were too much. I left my dumpling untasted, nor looked back until well hidden in the hill-side woods.

There has been but little chilly weather as yet, but enough to change the greenery of summer to less cheerful tints, for the asters and golden-rod do not quite replace the brightness of unaltered foliage. As often before, I notice how frost kills in an artistic way, and not in the fashion of the great leveller Death. The former leaves no taint of corruption behind it. These dead weeds to-day are pleasant companions. It is something to be surrounded by cheerful corpses, seeing we have so many uncheerful, living ones of our own kind to deal with every day. I prefer dried weeds, broken, brown and prostrate, to semi-defunct nonentities in human shape.

Searching the rough ground beneath several trees, I found an apple at last; a wrinkled, wasp-stung, sour, tasteless apple, and its general appearance, I do not know why, recalled Humphrey Fagan, the gleaner. He was a boy of six when the battle of Trenton was fought, and knew more about it than some of those that have had a good deal to say of the affair; but then, he was old Humphrey Fagan, the gleaner, and what did he know? What did he not know in certain directions? He was the only man in the neighborhood to whom the term "gleaner" was ever applied. This phase of peasant life was never represented before nor since about here. Everybody else was a farmer or a farm-hand, except the few too lazy to be anything. The idea of gleaning never occurred to any one but Humphrey. He had heard, perhaps, of the far better conditions that prevailed in Europe, and, cheerfully accepting poverty, lived a jollier life on what he was permitted to glean from the fields—every one of which he knew as no one else did—than did nine-tenths of the owners of these broad acres. He lived to be ninety, and at peace with himself. When I knew him he was so bent that his spine formed a considerable are of a circle, and so brought his face towards the ground and not very far from it. I have never seen any other man or woman so nearly "bent double," to use an inaccurate phrase; and of course his gleaning days were over, but not his days of usefulness and independence. His knowledge ot gardening was encyclopedic, and to the end he supported himself by caring for such enclosures. Never a weed grew where Humphrey attended. The children thought he used his huge hooked nose as a hoe, and we teased him a little on this score; but he was our stanchest friend, and many the quaint story he told when taking his nooning, and many the old pewter button, shoe-buckle, or copper coin and other colonial trifle he gave us.

"I was a boy o' six," he has told me twenty times, "when they fit with the British up in town, and mother shut me and my brother up in the cellar. We didn't want to miss the fun and didn't know o' no danger. Brother raised the big cellar-door just a little, to peep out, when the fellers came runnin' down the street, and one of 'em stept on the door and sent me and brother back on the wood-pile. I thought I was in the middle o' the fight," and then old Humphrey would laugh in his queer way—like a hen cackles—and almost straighten himself. "A'ter a bit we took another peep, and, the racket bein' furder off, we slunk out and legged it to foller the noise. Mammy saw and hollered, but we kep' a-runnin', and seen lots o' red-coats; and everybody kep' hollerin' to come back, but we was bound to see the fun, and we did;" and again the hen-cackle laugh would set us off, a good deal more than his story. Just as he recalled his boyish adventure, I recall his account of it, and how very near seems the actual occurrence! To have talked with one who witnessed the surrender of Colonel Rahl, and so figured in history, is a pleasanter recollection than the dry-as-dust pages that were to be memorized at school,—pages that made no impression, save a misty recollection of twaddle about men who were supposed to have never had equals before nor since. Humphrey Fagan had another story that roused him to infinite action when he told it, and doubtless the pain resulting from gesticulating and twisting his distorted body prevented its frequent repetition. It was necessary to hint in a quiet way for some time, and await his pleasure. Anything like a demand was certain to be met with refusal. We could always tell when the story was coming. There were certain movements of the body and a clearing of the throat indicating that his story was to be told,—one in which his manner went further than the matter. We would move back, if there happened to be several children gathered to hear him, that he might have abundant room for the vigorous swing of his cane. We almost fancied that he was in reality the king of the Pine Robbers. Much rubbish, by the way, has been written about the Tories. Everything they did was devilish; not an act of the Continental soldiers but was righteous. A few, of course, were rascals; but were the patriots all saints? At all events, Apollo Woodward was loyal to the king, and had as good a right to prefer Cornwallis to Washington as his neighbors had to think otherwise. But the story: Woodward and his black horse and Timothy Fagan with his wall-eyed sorrel were the only characters. "D'ye know, boys, what I see in the town that day was nothin' to the ride 'Polly Woodward and Tim Fagan took one winter night. They know'd aforehand what was goin' to be after the scrimmage at the bridge, and slunk out o' the village towards Pond Run, and then made for Princeton way on horseback. When in the saddle there was nothin' could stop 'em. They rid through the woods at a dead run where none could 'a' follered, and when they got to Stony Brook, Tim gave his horse a kickin' on the ribs to go over at a jump. The old wall-eyed sorrel did, but landed with a stake clean through its breast, and Tim went on till his head landed on a stone and his neck broke. 'Polly Woodward went on without knowin' what had happened, it was that dark. He turned when he missed Tim, and lost time in lookin', and when the light favored a bit it was too late to be in them parts, and he took to the woods. There was some as might see him 'fore he come up with the British. And what's more,"—here old Humphrey's manner changed and he lowered his voice, as if there was danger still in telling his story,—"what's more, he was home in time to turn up at Crosswicks askin' for news, innercent-like, when word came o' the battle o' Princeton;" and, in a still more mysterious way, continued, "they do say that hoss o' his'n never tired, and his feet didn't touch the ground when goin' through the woods, but was carried by spooks till there was good footin' ag'in. You see," and we children felt a strange importance in being the recipients of the opinion; "you see, if things had 'a' gone straight, Washin'ton wouldn't 'a' played his little game, and things might 'a' been different." Is it strange that, as children, we were sorry that "things didn't go different," and the Tories, in time, become the rulers of the land? Apollo Woodward was a hero in our minds before we had heard of the Revolutionary generals. They came later, and not in a way to eclipse our earlier favorites. I have heard old Humphrey say that " 'Polly Woodward would 'a' been a big 'un among 'em if the British had got the best of it, for he wasn't a man like the common run of 'em ;" and then he would give his head a mournful shake, his eyes lose their lustre, and the man would wilt like grass before the fire, and become the strange, quiet gleaner again, who lived all his life on the little his neighbors left behind them. Very taciturn now, except with children, yet a great talker when a young man, so report goes. Perhaps he had told too much in early days, for his old mother remarked on one occasion, " Yer tongue's big enough to scoop out all yer wits at once." It is a pity he had not been carefully interviewed; but as it was his tales gained no credence, and are nearly all forgotten now. This often happens. The jewels slip through our fingers and we are happy with empty caskets. Humphrey Fagan died, as I always put it, decently and in order. He was weeding radishes in my neighbor's garden when Death plucked him as a weed that had long enough encumbered this prosy corner of the earth.

In the distance I see the west end of a

brick dwelling, and, as the light of the afternoon sun falls upon it, the letters I. P. stand boldly out,—Isaac Pearson. He, too, was a lively Tory that gave the patriots no end of trouble. Those stirring Revolutionary times brought some strange men to the surface, and the journals of the Tories would prove instructive reading now that the bitterness of the conflict has died out. It is possible to look calmly on the whole affair, now that more than a century has elapsed and Tories have lost their blackness. But who cares for the under dog in any fight? is the common exclamation when its claims are set forth. True, nobody does during the heat of conflict; but, then, who should care for the clamor of a crowd? Not one man in a thousand is able to calmly think, nor more than one in a million who is fit to govern. The Tories had logic in abundance on their side, but lacked numbers to enforce it. They did not lack in brains. I have Apollo Woodward's autograph before me as I write these words. It is a John Hancock specimen of chirography, and shows, if handwriting means anything, that he was a leader among men. We are still taught that these Tories were bad men, cruel, and all that; but, then, you may remember that Somebody who is everywhere is not as black as he is painted, and the same of the loyal subjects of King George. They had as much at stake as their neighbors, and no one can doubt their bravery. For myself, I rejoice in the Tory blood that tingles to my finger-tips when I think of a certain old uncle, four generations back.

But let us to more cheerful matters. The wind is gently stirring the topmost leaves, but all the under branches are at rest. The faint rustling of these favored leaves is a pleasant sound, for wind is a great deal more than mere atmosphere in motion. That is quite enough when the motion kills and destroys, but I have naught to do with the pranks of a tempest or devilishness of a tornado. I am thankful to have lived beyond their reach, or to have lived, thus far, where mischief is the least that any wind has accomplished. All else that it can do it has done abundantly. I recall one sunny early autumn day, when with balm, boneset, pennyroyal, and spicewood distilling odors that told of every phase of the youth of the year's old age, I listened to the steady hum of unseen crickets that did not intermit; a steady, unbroken sound, as if earth was winding herself up for another year's activity. Then, suddenly, there was neither scent nor sound. A noisy silence filled the air,—the wind was blowing. Wind is the great silencer, and yet is itself impotent when unheard. That morning it was the first blast of the autumn wind that plucks the dying leaf, but brings a singing bird to take its place. Leaves now will soon be a feature of the past,—shadowy figures that memory but dreamily recalls,—but in their place are hundreds of cheerful sparrows from the northern woods. This is a compensation worth considering; and there is little logic in moaning over the sad, sighing, prophetic autumn wind. What if it does hint of winter and the fierce wind that then seems to be rejoicing over the victory of darkness over light, of death over life, of desolation over prosperity. So we hear of it, and what better proof of the world's ignorance of what winter really is. Winter is the flood-tide of intellectuality; and the brain-power that has moved and will move the world, and give to it the perfect fruit of man's ingenuity, dwells in those northern climes where there is a long, bright, health-giving, thought-inspiring winter.

There would be little satisfaction in eating a windfall apple were it not for its suggestiveness. I never came into this orchard for food. I had long since starved had this been necessary. But to day-dream is my errand. I was ever cautioned when a child about eating cheese at night, lest I should see my grandmother. I never eat the begrudged sour apples of my miserly neighbor but I do see my grandfather, and I am right glad of it. An old orchard is the entrance gate to the fields of retrospection, and there is much joy in fondly calling back "the good old times" that you know only through report. The comparisons between a long-dead yesterday and the present moment afford endless entertainment, but do not spoil the sport with the rot of hero worship. Do not believe that all the great people are dead. There are others quite their equal awaiting their opportunity. Alas! this may never come. But how unwise to discard the old ways and objects because of their age! Hold fast that which is good, even though it was old before the pyramids were built.

I love to loiter: to do so, in spite of the dictionary, is not to be lazy nor idle nor careless necessarily. When I expressed this opinion, it was claimed that I did not loiter when out of doors, but sauntered. I turned back to the dictionary and think still that I do loiter, and I love to do so. It is not strange. I never was sent on that childish horror, an errand, that "don't loiter" was rung in my ears. I always did and always shall. Haste and method are well enough for youth and men of science, but let me go my own gait, and I will talk all day to blooming thistles, if I choose; or write my name in dust, for the first chance breeze to obliterate. What a silent, slow, but sure undertaker is the dust! There is not a withered weed or blasted grass-blade but dust finds for it a covering. We in time are to return to dust, but the latter meets us more than half-way. It is forever on the lookout for the cessation of some activity, and falls upon it slowly, silently, but sure. I never took a quick step in this old orchard,—the surroundings do not permit of it,—and look long at the windfalls, often, before I stoop to gather them. It is preeminently a loitering place, and yet where we can never be quite inactive. If the trees do not appeal to me, as is sometimes the case, the birds in the branches will surely do so; or, if they are gone, then the weeds that have not been crushed beyond recognition. There is always an aggressive feature that attacks your eye or ear or nose,—an assertive something that holds you back, and you not only loiter, but tarry longer than you intended. This is the peculiar merit of an orchard; it is a happy combination of both field and forest. The hermit of Nottingham recorded in his journal, "If I must ever leave these woods, must go again into the open country, then let my cottage be in an orchard. Nowhere else do the birds find such congenial homes, as if man, for once, had brought about an improvement over nature. The robin that sang in father's orchard sang as never its kind has done since."

I have long had very much the same fancy. There is a charm in the shade of long rows of apple-trees that is recognized at once, but defies the senses just so far that you cannot analyze it nor describe it in detail, even though you come with such a purpose; and not, as is my custom, to loiter, to idly while away the passing hour, to indulge in a day-dream over windfalls and reluctantly depart.

MY NEIGHBOR'S WOOD-SHED

THE good old-fashioned folk of the last century built for their children as well as for themselves, and framed their buildings, as they did their lives, in such manner as should withstand the ordinary buffetings of relentless time. This applies to other structures than their houses, and the oak of many a wood-shed is as firm to-day as the rafters and joists of the colonial dwelling on the same premises. It is so at my neighbor's. There still stands the old wood-shed that his great-grandfather built, and I am envious. The idiotic demands for improvement and modernization caused mine to be demolished, and now, when longing for a lungful of old-time atmosphere, I take me to this neighbor's shed and breathe in the subtle odors of the scattered chips,—breathe in strength with the oak and, in fancy, the music of many birds with the odor of birch and sassafras chips of the trees that came from the meadows where, in April, the spring arrivals of our many birds are sure to congregate.

Somehow I never think of the really sad fact that this shed is the forest's charnel-house, and a fit place wherein to drop more honest tears than fall at most funerals. Is it because my neighbor is felling his forest and not mine? Probably; and, as we all know, Death's ravages among our neighbors excite our curiosity more than our grief. We are more apt to be inquisitive as to the details of the physical collapse than of the spiritual, —but I am no preacher.

How easy to build a tree from but a single chip! to see the round of the seasons at a single glance when the restored tree stands out before us! Even the lid of my old desk—that was split, sawed, smoothed, and shaped just one hundred and thirty-seven years ago—quits the corner of my little room and becomes again a stately walnut, on the bluff of old Crosswicks, the instant that I will it! And what tales of wild adventure in colonial days float vaguely in the mists of day-dreams such as this? The paw of a puma may have pressed where now my hand rests, and the knife of an Indian made the deep gash that the skill of the joiner has cunningly concealed.

Here is a piece of bark with a neatly cut hole in it, the work of a woodpecker; and here another chip, that has been channelled by a carpenter bee. Nothing but chips to be cast into the fire, yet written all over with unread history; chips to be trampled into the earth by my garrulous neighbors, who often gather in force at the wood-shed and chatter until the very air is thick with platitudes.

But this shed is something more than a shelter for firewood: it is a rich mine for him who is zoologically inclined. It is a great place for walking-sticks. I do not mean peripatetic firewood, but those green and brown twigs that are generously legged and look like animated splinters when in motion. Curious insects, these, whose homes are not here but among the oaks of the hill-side, yet there I see them but seldom; here, quite often. The last I found was full four inches long and of a beautiful bright-green color. It was cunning, and foiled my attempts to capture it quite cleverly. Do they make a noise of any kind? Folk-lore and superstition have heaped their whimseys on the poor insect's head, but, fortunately for it, the creature is shunned rather than persecuted. Riley says the walking-stick works destruction among oaks, but those about here have not shown much loss of twigs or foliage. As is apt to be the case, the folk-lore is mere silliness, and so a fit plaything for scientific triflers; but why the name "spider-killer" should be common I have never learned. Can it arise from the fact of the insect's appearance being somewhat similar to that of the praying mantis of the Southern States? Occasionally one of these walking-sticks takes a step too far and has a foot in the web of a spider. Then there is a commotion, and I am always a delighted spectator. We cannot altogether escape the effects of a non-human origin. More or less of the blood-thirsty tendencies of our tertiary-era ancestry will crop out on occasion. The walking-stick is very apt to be pretty well broken up before he gets out of the way, and sometimes is hopelessly disabled.

Of course there are hornets and wasps in the wood-shed, but they are always too busy to concern themselves with you, unless you provoke the assault. There are only two classes of people who meddle with wasps,—fools and entomologists. We beg pardon of the latter for this unavoidable association. One of these hornets is busy all summer in building long rows of clay cells, and into each is placed, so to-day's search disclosed, a pretty pink-and-yellow spider. I do not pose here as an entomologist, but the other thing. I got stung. The clay cells were built with a good deal of skill and quite quickly, but the supply of clay came from one spot near by, and so no time was lost; but no time was lost either in finding a spider, a round, fat, pink-and-yellow one. I followed the wasp, as best I could, and traced it to a weedy corner back of the barn, but no sign of any such spider was visible to me. There were dozens of other species, and some were large and ugly enough to stay my near approach. I hurried back to the shed and found the hornet just closing the cell on such a one as I could not find. Others of these ill-natured insects built paper nests, and at times buzzed their impatience when a hat or cane was brushed too near their homes; and frequently a black-and-white, noisy fellow came searching for house-flies, and would depart, when a capture was made, with a buzz that sounded like the "loud hum of satisfaction," as the newspapers have it, when a dull speaker has the luck to be momentarily brilliant. All these stinging insects are busy, however hot the day, and their earnestness makes them entertaining. They seem to be concentrations of the day's fierce heat, and more like winged flames than winged flies. It is warming to look at their empty nests on a winter day, if we recall the August sunshine and parched fields of the past summer. It is down in the books that wasps and hornets occasionally disfigure the walls of dwellings by placing their nests thereon. They are not so ugly; they will bear examination, and this is more than can be said of many a mantel ornament.

The red admiral and painted beauty butterflies are fond of the chips that clutter the floor of the wood-shed, though every one in summer is dry and dusty. They have no choice apparently, unless it be for the clean, white inner side of a chip. Is this that they may show themselves to greater advantage, or because such surfaces are warmer than the rough and darkly colored pieces of bark? It is hard to say, but temperature should hardly enter into the question when it is over ninety in the shade. The large yellow swallow-tailed butterfly is a frequent visitor, and also a big blue-black fellow that makes a grand display when the sun shines on his wings; but these come and go as if by mere chance. It is the smaller species that find the place fitted to their needs and stay while the sun shines directly in the shed. In midwinter the dingy mourning-cloak butterfly finds the place as attractive as its native woods, and remains there for many minutes at a time. In other words, they are not so restless. Are they attracted by the odor of the chips? for some of them are fresh and sappy. It seems strange that they should leave the wild woods for civilization, a display of bad taste on their part; but I always greet them with a hearty welcome. There is positive novelty about butterflies in winter, and this is even more marked when the insect comes dancing down a winter sunbeam and enters a prosy wood-shed. If some one of my neighbors happens to be present and sees it, there is sure to be some idle remark about the butterfly being a sign of something. These plain folk would have everything be nothing of itself, but a sign of something else; except, of course, that their twaddle is a sign of their own silliness. I was delighted one winter morning to have the fool of the neighborhood, its single downright idiot, put in an appearance just as Farmer Hayfork finished a long discourse on sure signs of an open winter. We were all tired, for he was one who measured his value by the length of his speeches, and never thought of the nerves of his hearers. "Had he been a preacher," it was once remarked, "there would never have been a congregation." The idiot appeared in the nick of time. Hayfork had just finished, when the fool blurted out, "Folks can say what they blame please, but you can't tell nothin' about nothin'." Everybody laughed but Hayfork, who suddenly remembered he had something to do.

As it is my neighbor's wood-shed, I could not keep these people away, and it was not often that I found it available for meditation or the excellent company that I occasionally met,—many a bird, butterfly, spider, centipede, or wasp. I never could tell just why it was, but a sunny day in winter or a rainy day in summer draws the odd characters of the neighborhood to this shed as tainted meat draws flies. It is the more difficult to explain because the tavern is not far off, and the owner of the shed has never been known to offer even a sample of his vinegar. He was not averse to company, on off days, or when there was nothing to do, but he has been heard to remark anent the presence of friends, "providin' it don't cost nothin'."

It was at my neighbor's wood-shed that I first met Winkle, "the eel-man," and, hearing such strange stories about him, I cultivated his acquaintance and held his friendship till he died. He certainly was an odd fish, but after a while you had the impression that he needed only education to make a man of mark. One day in summer it was told in my hearing that Winkle saw a sturgeon in Crosswicks Creek, and, having at hand no spear or other means of catching it, he made a bold dive and got a grip that the sturgeon could not loosen, and man and fish went dashing down-stream, nearly to the river, when they landed on a sand-bar and Winkle came off victor. How far fiction was mingled with fact in this story was of no importance. It showed Winkle to be a real fisherman, and I sought him on all occasions in preference to the solid folk of the farm-houses that stuck to their fields like leeches, sucking them dry.

For a time the school-teacher came on Saturday mornings, and was covertly disliked from the first because he monopolized the conversation. This conceited fellow would swing round the corner as if the world was too small for him and expected all present to hold their breath while he remained with them. Then he harangued. Woe to him who dared to interrupt! Was it not the school-master who was speaking? I soon wearied of the snob and demurred to many of his statements, and insisted when he had gone that it smacks of servility to accept a dictum because an individual has been giving forth opinions with an authoritative ring. Because a man snorts like a petty tyrant are we to swallow his decisions willy-nilly? The sluggish wits of my neighbors were finally aroused. They could remember nothing of all that he said, from week to week, beyond his broken promises. The school committee were not quite fools, but how silly they felt when the truth dawned upon them that this wordy teacher was a rank fraud. For such things to flourish, even in town, is not uncommon. Glare and tinsel catch the gaping crowd, but not forever. Gilt will not bear the handling of pure gold. There is a flush of common sense that illumines the intellectual night of the masses, as the aurora drives the blackness of darkness from the northern sky. Unfortunately, it is so short-lived a light. This school-master had his little day, but could not remain on his petty throne for all time, as he wished. He had little intrinsic value, and the fiat of the committee could not keep him at parity with truth. When the change came there was a general sigh of relief, but no one spoke: all felt how they had helped to hold up the hands of the humbug. How very seldom are we really brave. How well are we aware that one of the unexplained yet very common human phenomena is conceit of so rank a type as to be a perpetual stench in the nostrils of decency, and yet it is long tolerated by the average intelligence of a community and retained in places calling for erudition.

When this fellow was gone the atmosphere of the wood-shed cleared considerably and was sweeter. How much more acceptable was the innocent ignorance of the native than the empty declamations of a bumptious chatterbox.

But there were many days when the wood-shed was deserted,—bright, sunny, winter days, when the farmer folk were busy and the trapper was in the marsh and the fisherman with his little nets beneath the ice kept guard over them lest the big pike should give him the slip. The children, too, were all at school, and the wood-chopper off with his ox-team and axe to the far woods. It was sweet at such times to be alone. Here was a most excellent chance to welcome timid day-dreams and hear in every distant, muffled, droning sound the voices of the long departed—music from far away. What a sweet sound is the tinkle of drops of water when the snow on the roof is melting! Drip, drip, drip! And my thoughts are all atune to the glad sound. So, too, my moments pass, pass, pass, and the bare fact that I have added to my store of knowledge this hour is that I am older than when I entered the shed; but this is no serious matter. Is there not such a thing as knowing too much? True or not, I covet certain pleasures more than a brand-new fact, as I proved to myself to-day, when I lived over again the good old times of early youth and had converse with the sturdy folk that made this world brighter to my young eyes than it has ever been since I have wandered without their guidance. Such an hour as this is worth walking miles to spend, if so be your nearest neighbor's wood-shed is so far away.

Covered as is every cord-wood stick with suggestiveness from bark to innermost splinter, there is less to be conjured up by one of them than by the odd bits of old furniture that occasionally are brought to the wood-shed to be reduced to kindling. What a train of thought can be touched off by the leg of an old table, the arm of a chair, or the claw-foot of a bureau! To discard old furniture is much like throwing away a badge of respectability. Even though past all usefulness, its bones should be sacred.

Better turn the lid of an old desk into a bracket or wall-pocket than reduce it to ashes. But let it be your own people's furniture. Better admit that you had no grandmother than palm off some stranger's rocking-chair as an heirloom. The real heir may turn up some day and his presence lead to your confusion. The same little spinning-wheel has bolstered a bogus ancestral toss of the head in more than one parlor in the last decade, and what a row was there when I announced that the successive owners were gilded nobodies! I barely escaped the assassination that perhaps my foolhardiness deserved. I know whereof I speak when I say that the oldest grandfather's clock, according to its owner's account, was lying as ore in the bowels of the earth and as a walnut-tree grew in the forest not fifty years ago. I happen to hold the documents that reveal that boastful man's ancestral history. To take an interest in one's family history is well enough, but beware of the pride that it engenders if you can go back a few centuries. It creates envy, too, and many a heart-burning in others who cannot trace their forebears, as well as leads them to mild sinning of a harmless kind. A little lying and a good dinner has got more than one gentle dame into the coterie "Colonial."

But the shed was not given over wholly to wood, a few people, and many bugs. What would scarcely be expected, it was the favorite hunting-ground of many a hungry bird. I mentioned this one morning, and my audience, a stupid lout, remarked at once, "Chickens, you mean," and then laughed, as if he or I had said something funny. I did not offer to explain to him, but wondered, in silence, if it could be true that this man of some sixty years had never seen the winter wren that occasionally came darting through a knot-hole and chirped merrily as it hunted for insects in the shed's innumerable nooks and crannies. If true, then better be a winter wren than such a stolid specimen of humanity. Perhaps it is better to look only upon the bright side of the shield, but there is a dull side, nevertheless, although we may never see it. There are and always have been men in this old neighborhood who, while within the pale of sanity, are scarcely more intellectual than the horses with which they toil. "But they can talk," remarks some one. "So can horses," I reply. Probably I have said too much. This is dangerous ground whereon to tread, for I never saw a fool without a fist and with wit enough to use it, and yet had that winter wren perched upon the knee of this man he would have brushed it off as he would a wasp from his face and given the incident no further thought; perhaps not seen the difference between bird and insect. I am not exaggerating. There are scores of just such men as this one scattered over the country. I asked one once to kill for me two pairs of squabs. He bit their heads off. They are men that rouse to real enthusiasm when there is butchering to be done, and when unusual circumstances, as a funeral, force them to a church or formal gathering, sleep throughout the proceedings. They are carted, like produce, to market, to the polling-place, and given slips of paper to place in a box, and are then carted back again, excellent citizens and bright examples of the damnable heresy of universal suffrage. These men are, in fact, savages with the savage's more dangerous instincts held in check. Such are never observers in any other than a degraded sense. They can dig out a woodchuck or cut down a tree to catch the coon in its branches, and they judge of game by but two expressions, —"lean as a snake" and "fat as a hog." When their prey is the former their disappointment gives way to cruelty; when the latter, the animality of gluttony obliterates all else. The good Quaker farmers—all dead now—who used to own all these lands said of these men, whom they hired at very low wages, "They are men and brothers;" but I noticed that every Quaker of them all struggled quite ineffectually to conceal his disgust at the thought of such relationship. The phrase fell very glibly from their lips when they spoke in meeting, but not a word of it came from a greater depth than the mouth. But this bold assumption of sincerity is common everywhere. It was no peculiarity of this commonplace corner. Words that have much sound and have at times been weighty with significance rattle now like pebbles between our teeth, are spoken as mechanically as our breathing is involuntary. As everywhere else, so here at Thee-thou cross-roads, an earnest man has occasionally appeared, but his was a thorny path. A new idea was as sure to disturb the sacred routine of eventless life as a tornado cuts a path in the forest, and Quakers are opposed to violence. But mankind, intelligent or otherwise, is never as entertaining as bird-kind, which is never stupid. There was more fire in the beady black eyes of my friend, the winter wren, than could be gathered from the optics of a whole congregation.

When I have been lounging here in the wood-shed, alone in a certain sense,—for real solitude increases with the number of the loungers,—I have seen this wee brown bird come swiftly as a sunbeam through a knot-hole into the shed, and, perching on the chopping-block, survey the surroundings and myself more particularly. Did I mean mischief, was the evident tenor of its thoughts, and by my absolute quiescence I assured it, as best I could, that I did not. There was no sudden interchange of thought between us, but when an understanding was reached the purposes of the wren were carried out without further regard to myself. This it was I did not like. It is a great shock to human pride to be overlooked. I think I could have sympathy for the man who murdered because unjustly and persistently ignored. It is harder to bear than any physical pain, and to crown all this miserable business, so frequent everywhere, it is generally the genuine worth that has it to bear at the hands of the upstart whom luck has favored. I coaxed my wren to meet me half-way, but my soft words buttered for it no parsnips. Then I made a more substantial advance by offering food, and, when I humbled myself to be the bearer of its cup and trencher, then it came within the pale of sociability, and I slowly gained its confidence, but arm-length confidence only, and never as much as contact with my finger-tips.

It is the wren, however, that is the important feature of the place, and my personality need not be further set forth to public gaze. The wren came and went without let or hinderance, and wherever it chanced to tarry there was gladness, except possibly in the breasts of half-awakened spiders that even in midwinter seemed to be vaguely conscious of what was going on about them. Do they hybernate with a few of their eyes open? I once saw, it was in summer, a huge gray spider show effectual fight and the wren — the little house-wren — apparently suffered from the poison of the enraged arachnid's bite; but such an occurrence is doubtless quite unusual. But all this hunting for food was quite commonplace in comparison to the exhibition of the bird's scansorial ability. To people with poor eyesight the bird would certainly be taken for a mouse, and I do not think the latter ever ran where the wren could not follow. There will always be in a wood-shed, as elsewhere, some inaccessible nook that sooner or later attracts attention and arouses a deep desire to investigate. More than once I noticed it while loitering at my neighbor's. The poor bird sometimes found that neither wings nor legs were available, and the little fellow's annoyance became supreme. The effort to poise like a humming-bird before a flower was a flat failure,—though I have seen a crow accomplish this difficult feat successfully,—and then it was, as if to soothe its irritation, the bird would break forth in a series of sweet notes that was something more than a faint echo of the marvellous song of summer-tide. To be baffled is never pleasant, and to a wren of any species it is intolerable. They, of all birds, demand their own way in all things, and when foiled are not models of patience, even though they sing at such a time.

Wrens, like ourselves, have their full share of troubles, and the *bête noir* of this wood-shed visitor was my neighbor's cat. Grimalkin never appeared to drop in with no special purpose in view, or merely, if in winter, for the sake of the warmth and shelter. These were always to be had behind the kitchen stove. There was one chance in a thousand of surprising that wren, and this one remote possibility was a powerful incentive. An occurrence like this would be such a pleasant break in the monotony of feline existence that the very thought was inspiring. On the other hand, the wren was not moved by fear when the cat appeared, but by intense indignation. There might be room enough in the world for cats and wrens, but not in a wood-shed. The cry was immediately set up of war to the knife, and, like many another noisy conflict, ended in one of words only. The wren protested at the intrusion, and followed this with the boldest of passes at grimalkin's face, yet always stopped short just out of reach, or, making an attack from the rear, sped like a flash of light over the cat's head and so near it that puss shook her ears and looked the daggers that she would like to have used. Her sharp claws came and went in her velvety paws, but were of no avail as weapons of offence, and the occasional leap after the retreating bird fell far short of the intended victim. The wren's dexterity and the cat's continued failure begat a confidence in the former's dauntless breast that never in turn led to carelessness, while early in the game grimalkin became discouraged and retired to think it all over when again in her accustomed place behind the kitchen stove. Then also the ordinary chirp, for which we can suggest no special significance, became a song-like utterance that was readily interpreted. Our winter birds, as we see them out in the fields or along the narrow cow-paths leading through the meadows, may not be entertaining at all times, and but a languid interest, at best, is aroused even when they sing, but there is an infectious earnestness in the pretty ways of the wood-shed-haunting winter wren to which the spectator is certain to respond unless as sluggish as some of the strange people I have met.

There were other birds that occasionally made visits, but not one of them attracted the wren's attention, though the novelty of the surroundings always excited their volubility. The nuthatches, the tree-creeper, golden-crowned kinglet, the ever-delightful chickadee, the jaunty crested tit, and blue snowbirds all came in the days following a deep snow. They came, they saw, but it was not so certain what they conquered. Not one of these, however, was so frequent a visitor as that prince of winter song-birds, the Carolina wren. It was never at a loss for a song and, if we consider chirping equivalent to talking, as I have always done, for something to say. And what an inspiriting utterance is its song! The air fairly trembled when it rang out in the clear, cold air, and I have often fancied that even the sleepy cows in the barn-yard looked up with pleasure. Did the song recall the sweet grasses in the June meadows when every thrush was cheering its nesting mate and all the bird-world was thankful for the early summer? How little is needed to start an endless train of thought, and what would this world be without its unfailing suggestiveness? Facts are poor things when they lie about us as so many soulless clods giving no hint of whence or whither.

Here let me add what I wrote a year ago, when lingering alone in the old wood-shed, elaborating a few notes that I jotted down that day and days before when wandering aimlessly about, or, as is more in accordance with winter customs, cuttin' 'cross lots for the dear old shelter.

Memory and imagination serve me so well, it does not seem possible that forty years have passed since old Miles Overfield fashioned a little willow whistle, and, gathering a group of boys about him, held them spell-bound by the skill with which he executed "Money Musk," "Irish Washerwoman," and "Napoleon crossing the Alps," and, as a grand wind-up, that sweet old tune, the "Merry Swiss Boy." I have said "a group of boys." There were seven of us then—but two now. Time has destroyed or witnessed the destruction of much that made the world beautiful in our eyes, but the old tunes remain, and there can never cling to more recent and elaborate compositions that quality of endearment which is the firmly fixed feature of the old tunes I have mentioned. They whispered to us the secret of music's charm, and we shall never forget the thrill of their confidences. Combine those same sweet sounds as you will, and bring with them the choicest of a poet's thoughts, it will not appeal to us like the cruder sweetness that fell upon the untutored ears of boyhood.

There was no lack of bird-music this morning. A warm sun after a snow-storm always brings the minstrels to the front, and they practise, if not elaborately perform, at such a time. It is a strange impression, that has been crystallized by print, that birds do not sing except at nesting-time. As well say they do not eat. I defy any one to indicate a note missing from a robin's song that I heard yesterday. It was snowing at the time, but not even this disturbed the bird. Its throat was full of sound that trickled out with as much sweetness on the bare twigs as though the air was heavy with the odor of apple-blossoms. Purple finches put enough melody in their lisping chirps to warm the north side of the old oaks, and what the Carolina wren thought of the weather could be heard half a mile across the meadows. Winter that chills a bird's heart does not wander this far from the Arctic Circle. So much for midwinter minstrelsy in general, and a word now of that merriest of them all, the dear old song-sparrow. Since the country was settled he has been the chief singer of the garden, the leader of the choir that gathered in the dooryards of old-time farms, the associate of the wren and bluebird, chippy and the peewee, —all sweet singers in their simple way, but fitful and fair-weather birds, that must needs have summer to keep them in humor; but the song-sparrow is unfaltering. If the gooseberry hedge is not sufficient shelter, it seeks the cedars or the quaint old box-bush that stands like a fossilized sentinel by the front door. "What is a little frost," it asks, "that my comrades make such a fuss?" There is plenty and to spare of sunshine, if not just here, down on the hill-side, and the wind does not creep around every corner.

I have learned to take my winter outings as the song-sparrow takes his, and we have good times together, and then, beyond all else, he still sings the same old song that I heard when the world beyond the garden walls was all a mystery.

Lilacs, syringa, cocorus, a Missouri currant-bush, peonies, poppies, clove-pinks, Johnny-jump-ups, a patch of ribbon-grass, a gooseberry hedge, grape-arbor with blue-bird-box at entrance, and plenty of song-sparrows. Arrange them as you choose, that makes little difference, but of such material was formed the old-fashioned garden, and there never has been any improvement upon it. Evolution exhausted itself in that direction in colonial times. I only knew Quakers in my earliest days, but were these folk not over-fanciful in declaring that the bird sang *thee, thee, thee, thee—thee, thee, thou, thou?* I have heard other and more descriptive words used, but it is folly to attempt an imitation of song by phrases. The quail says Bob White, and all the rest of bird utterances are matters only of their own language.

Every spot, however limited, has its own atmosphere. The air of the meadow and of the upland, of the mountains and seashore, are the same, yet how unlike! Within the range of my rambles the sand all summer drinks in the sunshine and gives it back in generous volume during the coldest winter days. Here we have what my neighbors call a "soft" air,—one tempered by the wealth of odors from a varied vegetation. The trailing arbutus, sweet-scented vernal-grass, June roses, the magnolia of the swamps, new-mown hay, blooming grape, yarrow and the many mints, and the rich aroma of the ripened nuts,—all these and many more leave a trace behind them, and I fancy that I recognize each, in turn, when the first frosty winds of winter rattle the loose shingles overhead and whistle through the seamy walls of my neighbor's wood-shed.

THE END.

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